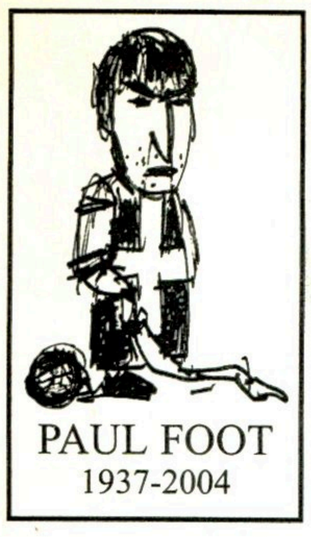

PRIVATE EYE

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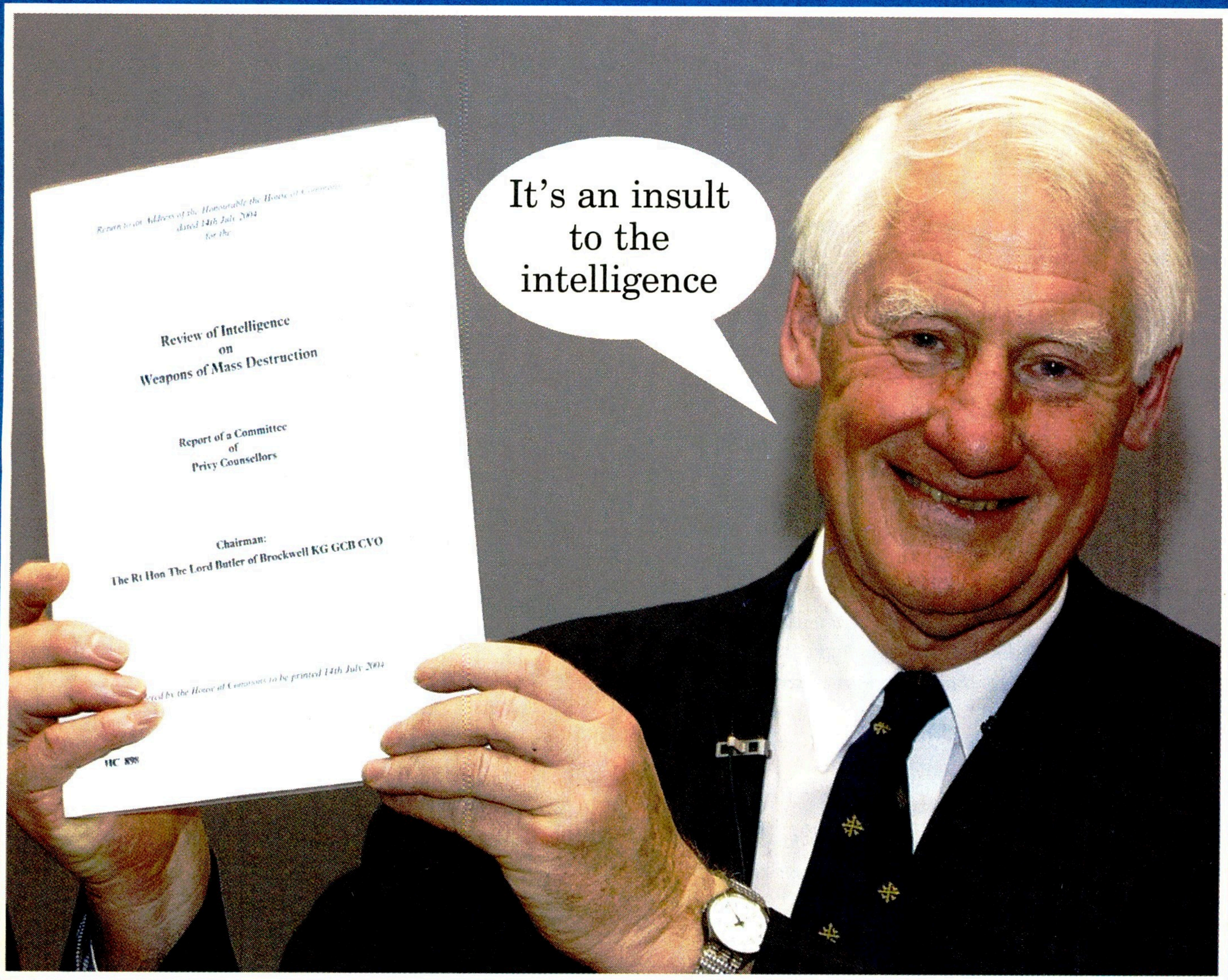

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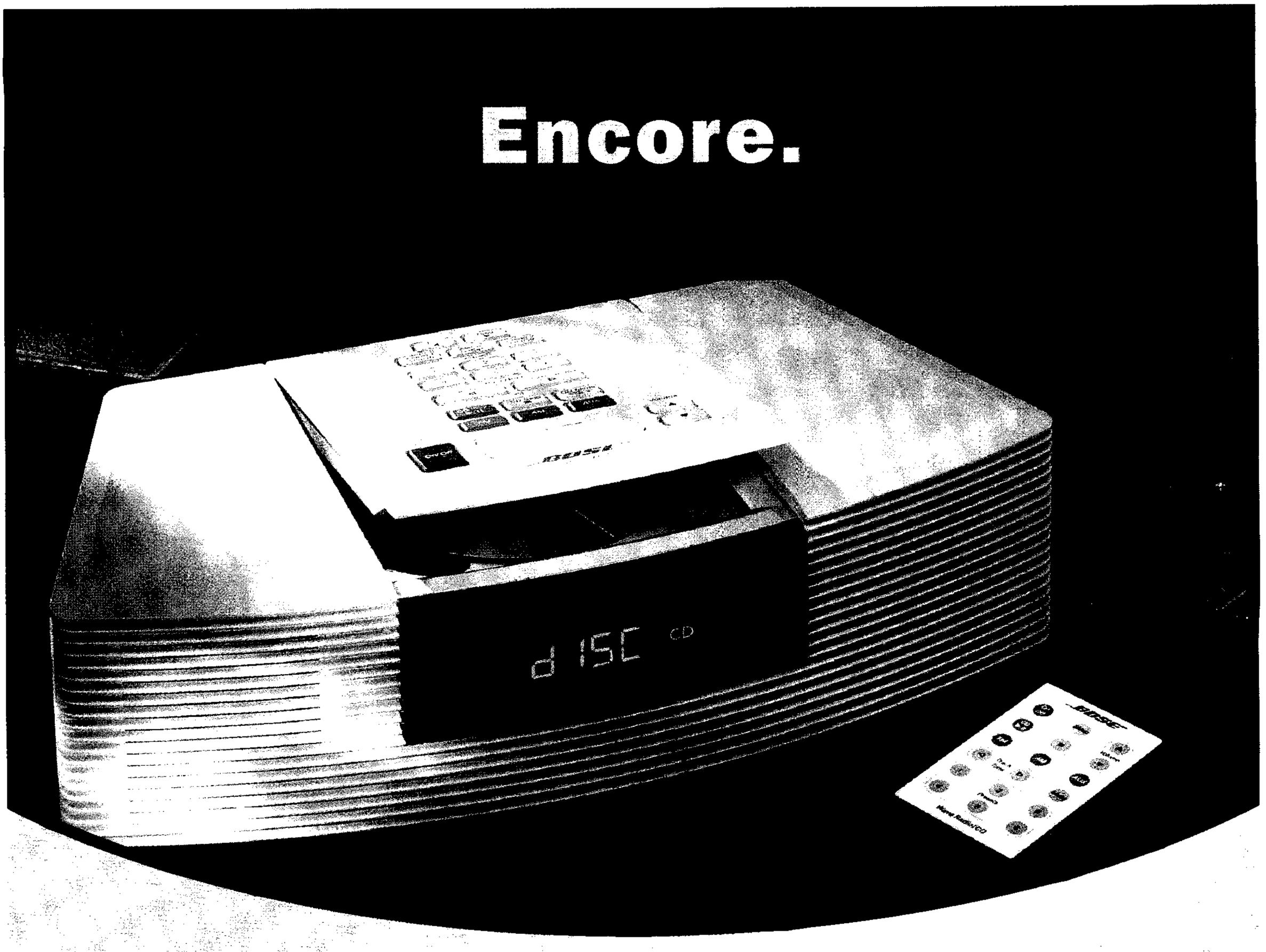

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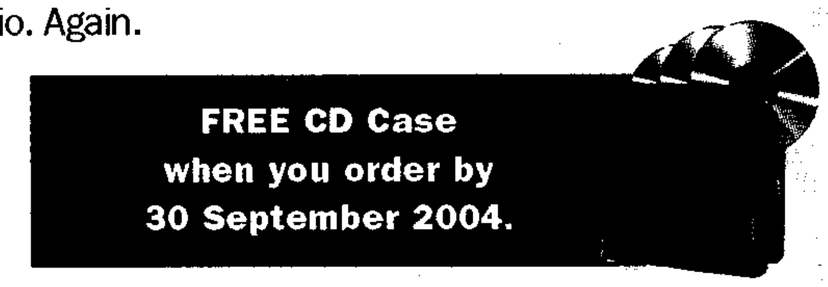

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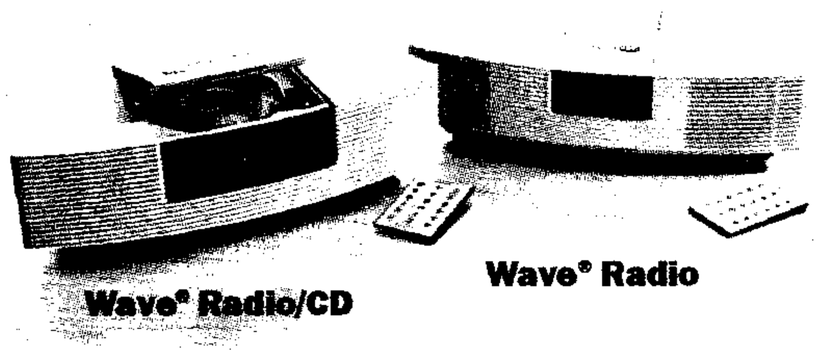

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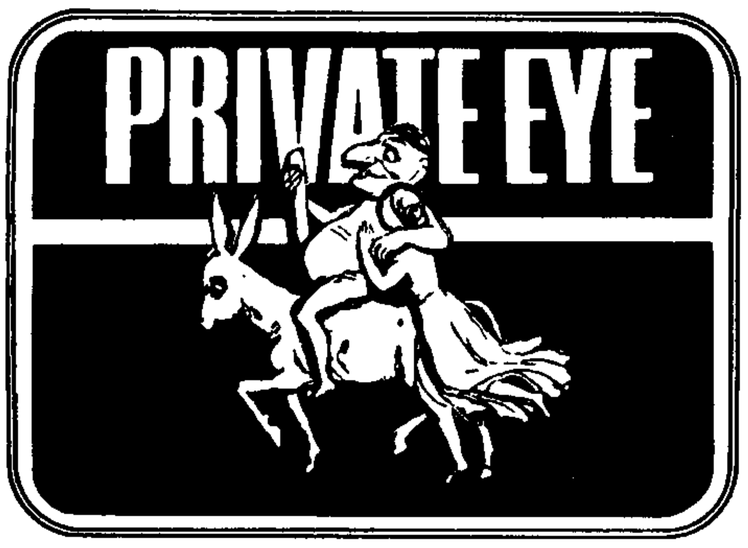

IN MARCH 2003, shortly before the American and British invasion of Iraq, *Private Eye* asked the foreign office to comment on the revelation that Iraq's top defector, Hussein Kamil, had told the Iraqi weapons inspectors that Iraq had destroyed all its stocks of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The FO told *Private Eye* clearly that Kamil's claims "were dismissed at the time as a complete fabrication" and that the intelligence services believed Kamil was "lying". But last week the Butler report reproduced joint intelligence committee (JIC) documents showing that the security services did *not* dismiss Kamil's claims or believe that they were a complete fabrication.

General Kamil, Saddam's son-in-law, defected from Iraq in 1995. In March 2003, shortly before the start of the war, *Newsweek* reported a leaked copy of the transcript of his interview with the weapons inspectors. Kamil revealed the extent of Iraq's chemical, nuclear and biological warfare programmes and their missile production, but also said that these programmes were ended and destroyed in the years after the first Gulf war.

The first part of Kamil's revelations meant his name was mentioned in every government dossier and speech as evidence of Saddam's mania for WMD… but the second part of his revelations was kept secret. However, the Butler report reproduces JIC minutes from August 1995, reacting to Kamil's revelations. In 1995 the JIC stated: "We assess [Iraq] may also have hidden some specialised equipment and stocks of precursor chemicals but it is unlikely they have a covert stockpile of weapons or agent in any significant quantity; Hussein Kamil claims there are no remaining stockpiles of agent."

So not only does the JIC note Kamil's claims that stockpiles were destroyed, it also agrees that "it is unlikely they have a stockpile of weapons or agent". The JIC suggestion that the Iraqis may have hidden some equipment for resuming production at a future date also seems to come from Kamil's interview, as the Iraqi defector suggested this was a possibility.

While the intelligence services may have convinced themselves, on the basis of weak and faulty intelligence, that Iraq later made more WMD, it is hard to see how this report tally's with the foreign office statement that Kamil's account was seen as an "utter fabrication".

Last week *Private Eye* asked the foreign office to explain its 2003 statement. It said that chief weapons inspector Rolf Ekeus had described Kamil's completely true claims (that the Iraqis had destroyed WMD) as a complete fabrication. The FO said it was "not sure there is a discrepancy" between the JIC's 1995 evaluation that Kamil was right and there were no WMD and Ekeus claim that he was lying. There was "no contradiction between" these two positions as "all these things go in the mix" when making a judgement. So that's all right then.

"Bloody sixties liberal rubbish!"

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Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ. **Distributed** by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC

MORE on Aegis Defence Systems, the British private military contracting firm run by Colonel Tim Spicer, which picked up a whopping $293m job from Iraq's coalition provisional authority (CPA) to oversee security operations.

Spicer previously made headlines with his botched efforts at sanctions-busting in Sierra Leone and dealing with rebels in Papua New Guinea. He has started several security businesses in the past, although only the infamous Sandline has done noticeable business.

Documents held on Aegis at Companies House do little to clear up the mystery of how a two-year-old company not on any approved Pentagon list of security companies landed the mammoth Iraqi deal (*Eye* 1109).

Spicer, who to no one's knowledge has filed a claim to be a beneficiary of a confidentiality order under the companies act, fails to give a home address as required, either as shareholder or director, giving instead the company's address — although perhaps the old soldier is sleeping on a camp bed in his office. Paid up share capital in the company amounts to just £137, although it has some 19 shareholders, with about half hidden behind nominee names. Spicer's 35 percent share has a value of just £50.

Among those shareholders who are named is none other than Frederick Forsyth, who is in for a grand total of £4.14.

Despite being nearly two years old, the company has yet to file its first accounts.

ON THE eve of the Butler report's publication, former joint intelligence committee chairwoman Dame Pauline Neville-Jones told the BBC that Tony Blair should be held responsible for any failings in British policy towards Iraq.

"The buck stops there," she declared, "and I don't think that the political layer in any country can escape the consequences of systemic failure."

Dame Pauline knows a thing or two about systemic failure. As political director of the FCO when Douglas Hurd was foreign secretary in the mid-1990s, she was centrally involved in Britain's policy of giving Slobodan Milosevic a free hand in eastern Bosnia. SAS observers were withdrawn from Srebrenica and British generals overruled any air support for the Dutch UN garrison, who had to surrender and leave Srebrenica's inhabitants to be slaughtered – the worst war crime on European soil since World War II.

Neville-Jones was also the British representative at the 1995 Dayton peace talks which carved up Bosnia and led to the easing of financial sanctions against Belgrade. What her fellow-negotiators didn't know was that Pauline had already spoken to her mate Douglas Hurd about joining him in the private sector at NatWest Markets – which she duly did a few months later. Soon afterwards Neville-Jones and Hurd were breakfasting with Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade to celebrate his new business partnership with NatWest, which helped keep the regime afloat by supervising the sell-off of Serbian telecoms.

Now Dame Pauline tells us that politicians mustn't "escape the consequences" of their sins and errors. But clearly the stricture doesn't apply to a mere mandarin: these days she is chairman of the weapons firm QinetiQ, as well as a governor of the BBC, and she was recently named as the front-runner to become next chairman of Eurotunnel. Surprisingly, Milosevic hasn't yet called her as a character witness.

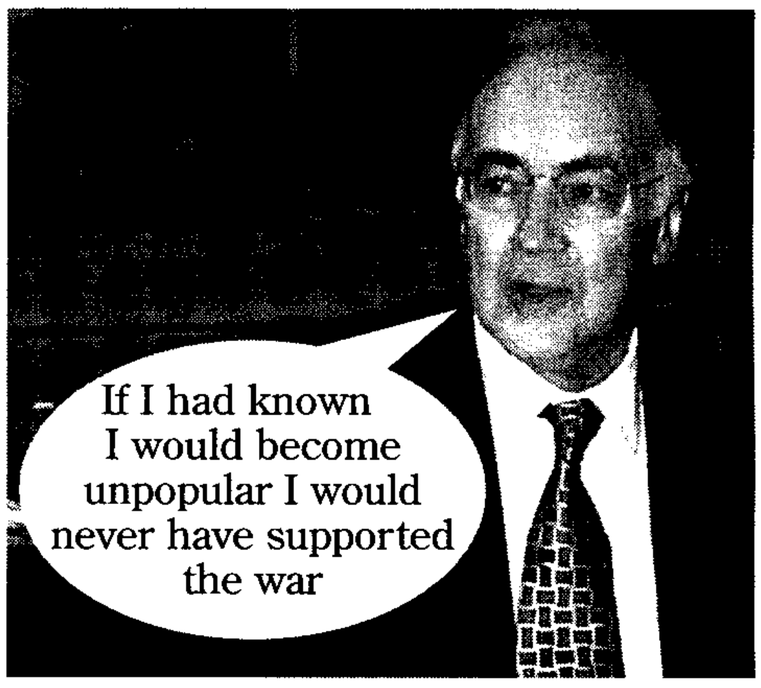
JOHN GUMMER, MP for Suffolk Coastal, was secretary of state for the environment in the Tory government when the district auditor published his devastating report on Dame Shirley Porter and her conspiracy to gerrymander votes to keep Westminster council Tories in office.

Like all Tory luminaries of recent years (Thatcher; Major; Hague; Duncan Smith; and Howard), Gummer couldn't bring himself to condemn Porter's corrupt gerrymandering. But he did give a series of pledges to the Commons that he would do so in future if Porter were proved to have acted wrongly.

In January 1994, he said: "In the end, if the allegations are found to be true, I will, as I have said unreservedly and without distinction between political parties, condemn them"; and in May 1996 he repeated: "I have made it clear that I would condemn utterly any failure to meet the highest standard of propriety, whenever it is found and whoever is found guilty."

Now that Lady Porter has agreed to pay back £12.3m of the £42m she was surcharged by the auditor, and the highest courts in the land have upheld the auditor's decisions, Mr Gummer's unreserved and utter condemnation of the dreadful dame is eagerly awaited.

VAMPIRE: TOOTHLESS



ALAN MILBURN, the Labour MP for Darlington who left the government as health secretary to spend more time with his family, has at least found time to attend board meetings at the investment fund Bridgepoint and deliver the keynote speech at the PPP Forum conference in Birmingham on 1 July.

He told delegates: "I am proud to have been associated with the new hospital developments in Hereford, Worcester and Coventry." What he didn't tell delegates was that in all these cases hospital beds and staff had to be cut; and the cuts associated with the new hospital at Worcester led to such prolonged local fury that the Labour MP had lost his parliamentary seat.

Milburn went on to warn the businessmen at the conference that in future they would have to put up with "greater scrutiny and accountability" (of the type that wasn't noticeable when he was at the department of health).

PAUL FOOT (1937-2004) see over

PAUL FOOT 1937 – 2004

LAST Friday Paul Foot came in to work at *Private Eye*, as usual, and by the end of the day had produced his customary reams of copy, leaving the editor with the equally customary problem of how to fit it all in. Paul delivered each story with the triumphant enthusiasm of a cub reporter turning in his first scoop. "We've really got the bastards this time!"

On Sunday he and his family set off for a trip to Ireland, but had got no further than the airport when Paul had a heart attack and died instantly.

In a way, this shouldn't come as a surprise: Paul almost died four years ago, spending six months in hospital after his aorta burst, and had survived several health scares thereafter. But precisely because these hadn't felled him, his colleagues had come to think of him as indestructible.

Since his near-death experience with the 1999 aneurysm, which left him unconscious and immobile for weeks, he had defied medical predictions by fully recovering his mental faculties. (While still in his hospital bed, soon after regaining consciousness, he signalled the return to business as usual by writing a *Guardian* article chiding his friend and colleague Francis Wheen for supporting the Kosovo intervention.)

Even physically, however, he seemed far stronger than anyone could have dared hope. At a time when doctors were saying that he would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, and he was feeling understandably low, he received a hospital visit from Tony Benn. "Well, Paul," Benn noted cheerfully, "it'sh never been your legsh we admired you for." The invalid perked up at once.

His wheelchair was soon jettisoned, and then his crutches. For the last few years he needed no more than a walking-stick, just like his beloved uncle Michael Foot. After one of their regular lunches at the Gay Hussar in Soho, the two Feet could be seen striding along Charing Cross Road arguing about Byron, or perhaps the Pankhursts, each gesticulating with his walking-stick to emphasise a point – a considerable hazard to any passer-by who wasn't quick enough to duck.

Paul formally joined the staff of *Private Eye* in 1967, but in spirit he had been part of the team from the outset as an old schoolfriend of the founders Richard Ingrams, Christopher Booker and Willie Rushton. And although he left the magazine a couple of times – to edit *Socialist Worker* in the mid-1970s, to work for the *Mirror* between 1979 and 1993 – he never actually cut his ties.

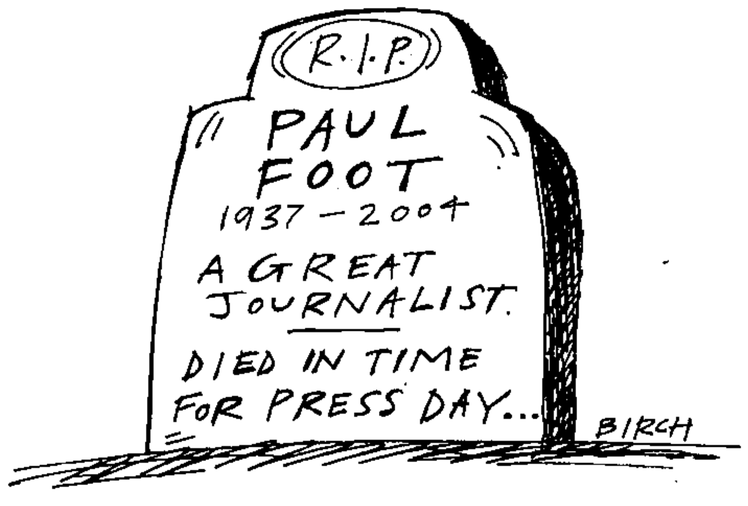
"Writing for *Private Eye* is the only journalism I have ever been engaged in which is pure enjoyment," he wrote in the preface to *Words as Weapons* (1990), a collection of articles from publications as diverse as the *Daily Mirror* and the *London Review of Books*. In the sequel, *Articles of Resistance* (2002), he explained why: "The point about the *Eye*, which no one seems to grasp, is that it has no proprietor and therefore no one to act as a financial or commercial bully over the editor. It is just about the only substantial publication in Britain that can claim to be part of a free press." He loved the *Eye*, and we loved him.

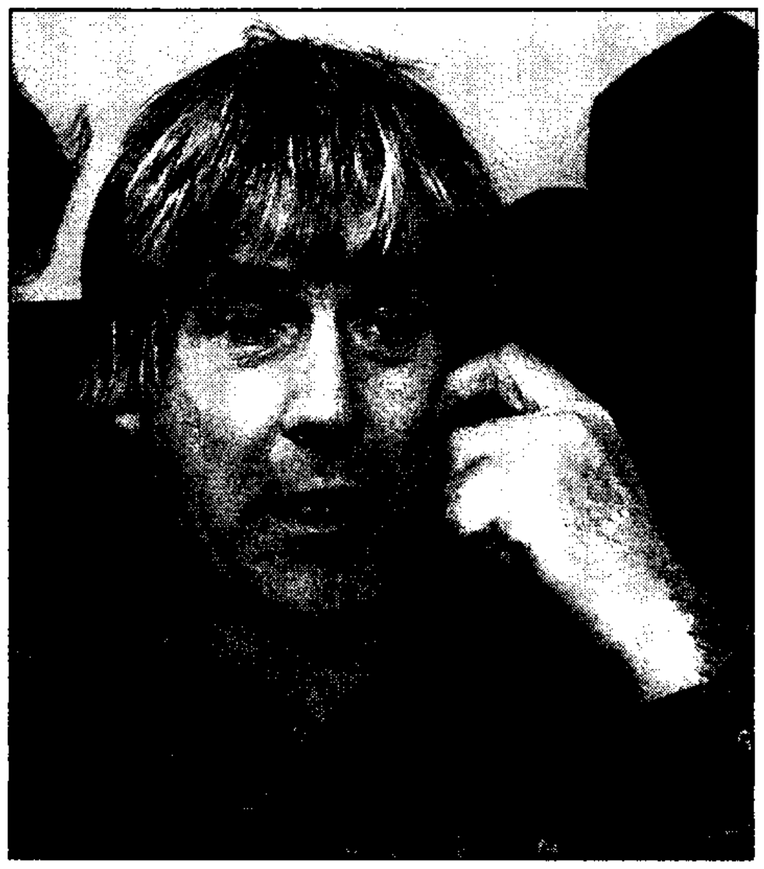
So did countless others, often in the most unlikely quarters. For a hard-hitting muck-raker who exposed scoundrels galore – John Poulson, Jeffrey Archer, Jonathan Aitken – he had remarkably few enemies. Though an active member of the Socialist Workers' Party (formerly the International Socialists) for more than 40 years, he was defiantly unsectarian: his friends and contacts included high Tories and earnest Liberals, Whitehall mandarins and unemployed bus-drivers.

What drew them and many others to Paul Foot was not only his journalistic integrity and persistence but also the contagious joy he found in his work. The world's absurdities aroused anger and amusement in equal measure: he could never resist laughing at each new folly or crime he discovered, even as he was writing a devastating *exposé*. ("I'm an optimist," he would say, by way of explanation. "You couldn't be a socialist in this country if you weren't optimistic.") His unflagging good humour also meant that he could laugh at himself, and at his political schemes. At his sixtieth birthday party he rounded off the evening by making all the guests sing a favourite anthem by the socialist balladeer Alex Glasgow, in which the chorus – increasingly slurred after each succeeding verse – goes: "As soon as this pub closes, the revolution starts."

In an age when many journalists see the business of exposing awkward facts as no more than a stepping-stone on the route to media celebrity and a first-person column with a large picture byline, Paul took the unfashionable view that the most important function of newspapers wasn't the flamboyant expression of opinions but the publishing of information which certain powerful people wished to suppress. After many years in journalism, garlanded with prizes, he could have eased off a bit and turned into a mere pontificator; but the thrill of the chase never waned. Only last year he wrote a huge *Eye* supplement on the Inland Revenue's sale of all its properties to a company based in, er, a tax haven. As recently as this March, he produced an *Eye* special report on the private finance initiative. "A shining exception to the media's failure to get to grips with the PFI scandal has been *Private Eye*," Nick Cohen wrote in the *Observer*. "The current issue contains an 11-page 'idiot's guide' by Paul Foot to the buck-passing and buck-pocketing which PFI has brought to the public sector. Anyone who wants to know why their children and grandchildren will be paying for the folly of this generation of politicians should read it."

And, because he kept at it for so many years, Paul had the sublime pleasure of confirming the old proverb that if you wait by the river long enough, eventually you will see the bodies of all your enemies float by. In the late 1960s he wrote an article in the *Eye* exposing Jeffrey Archer's expenses fiddles at the United Nations Association, soon after Archer had been selected as the Tory candidate for Louth. ("This man really shouldn't get into parliament," Paul commented after hearing the details from the UNA chairman, Humphry Berkeley. "Parliament?" bellowed Berkeley. "He should be in a remand home!") One of his great delights in the past decade was reading Downing Street memos released under the 30-year rule which showed how his *Eye* investigations in the 1960s had enraged Harold Wilson.





The proverb also worked in reverse, for those whom Paul championed. From 1980 onwards he wrote countless articles (and a book, *Murder at the Farm*) about the wrongful imprisonment of the Bridgewater Four; in 1997 he was at last able to report that their convictions had been quashed. For many other victims of injustice a letter to Paul Foot was either the first line of appeal or the last desperate hope – and, if he thought they had a case, he would somehow find time to pursue it, for decades if necessary.

His long perspective owed much to his profound interest in history and literature. At the age of eight he earned half-a-crown from his grandfather, the book-loving Liberal MP and Methodist preacher Isaac Foot, for learning and reciting the whole of Macaulay's "Horatius". He then got a florin for memorising Tennyson's "Revenge", and a shilling a time for lengthy Shakespearean soliloquies. Like his grandfather, and his uncle Michael, he suffered throughout his life from incurable bibliomania.

Paul's output was astonishingly diverse. How could the same person write with such passion about PFI and the poems of Shelley, about William Blake and Railtrack? The best answer is in the title of that 1990 collection, *Words as Weapons*, and in the blurb which his editor wrote for it: "Underpinning all his work… lies a respect for the power of the written word to intervene." It is hard to think of any British reporter in the last 40 years who intervened more consistently, indefatigably and gleefully. He is irreplaceable.

Francis Wheen

The Editor writes:

News of Paul Foot's death came through on the eve of publication of this issue of *Private Eye* and there has not yet been time to prepare a tribute of the kind that Foot's extraordinary contribution to the magazine deserves. Nor is there space here to do justice to forty years in which his name came to be synonymous with investigative journalism. Apart from anything else I am sure he would be furious if he thought I had spiked any of his stories in order to make way for peices about him. I have therefore decided to publish a special issue of *Private Eye* in September to celebrate Foot's life and work. All those who knew him or came into contact with him are welcome to contribute and I would like to hear from former journalistic colleagues, fellow activists, literary enthusiasts and especially anyone who was helped by one of Paul's exposes or campaigns. Thank you to readers for the letters which have already begun to flood into the office and I will be printing a selection of these in due course.

Paul's family wishes his funeral to be open to all. If you would like to attend, please email hilary.lowinger@private-eye.co.uk for details, or call Hilary on 020 7437 4017.

Street of Shame

THE *Sun*'s insistence that Lord Hutton was right, the BBC is evil and there was nothing remotely dodgy about any of the evidence that took us to war left the Murdoch rag in a quandary when Lord Butler came to his rather different conclusion.

Editor Rebekah Wade responded by hiding Butler's findings on page 8 (three pages after her Big Brother coverage), and instead devoted her front page that day to an exposé of the BNP — which, she had to concede, had been lifted from a "brilliant BBC documentary".

If readers thought her headline on the BNP story — "Bloody Nasty People" — was pisspoor, two days later they were treated to the one that got away. That was when assistant editor Dominic Mohan headlined his own execrable Saturday column "Barking Nobhead Plonkers". With talent like that, can promotion to the big chair be far away?

"TWENTY-TWO year old has drink" may not be the most spectacular scoop in the world, but when the *New York Post* printed pictures of "Boozer Britney" swigging from a miniature whisky bottle in the street last week, the popstrel's lawyers swung into action.

They issued a statement claiming that "Ms Spears intends to file a lawsuit unless the newspaper immediately issues an appropriate retraction, apology and financial settlement".

So what, given that the shopkeeper who sold her the bottle insists that its contents were not whisky but a health tonic called Panax Red Ginseng Extractum, is the *Post*'s defence? Er, that it merely lifted the story from its Murdoch stablemate across the Atlantic, the *Sun*, which had devoted a double-page spread and a front page trail to how "troubled Britney had sunk to a new low" the day before. So it must be true!

THOMAS Harding, Irish correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote a lyrical piece in the *Spectator* on 10 July announcing that "Ireland is at peace".

The fact that he had spent an evening in a Republican bar without being beaten up was "the proof of a theory that has been brewing for a while – proper peace has descended over Northern Ireland… It has largely gone unreported, but Ulster finally appears content with compromise, and it's going to be almost impossible to return to the bad old days."

Whoops! In the *Telegraph* on 14 July, Harding described how on the previous day he "accompanied [Paras] as they came under attack during Belfast's worst rioting in two years". The platoon of paratroopers was "surrounded by an angry mob of protesters who appeared intent on murder. This was not Basra, Kabul or Kosovo; it was Belfast…"

THE *Grauniad* should have known better… but it couldn't resist chastising the public recently for its "epidemic" illiteracy.

The commonest "word crime" it cited was confusion between "defuse" and "diffuse", a mistake made by 50 percent of the population, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

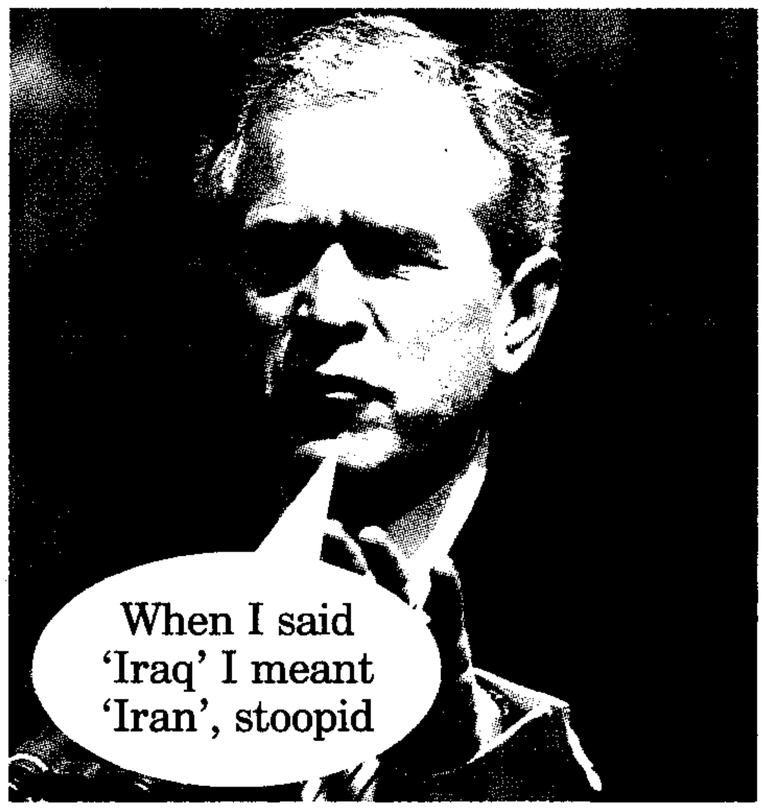
It's such a common mistake even national newspapers make it. Indeed, on the very same day one respected broadsheet did. It reported the retirement pledge of Mexican president Vicente Fox, saying: "The announcement appeared to diffuse political tension caused by Mr Durazo's resignation…" The paper in question? You guessed it.

MANY *Guardian* readers were bemused back in March when the paper devoted an epic 1,600 words and the cover of its G2 section to the concept of "50-quid bloke" – a supposed social phenomenon identified by David Hepworth, boss of magazine company Development Hell.

The piece, which prompted a number of scornful letters from readers who failed to recognise themselves in its description, featured an in-depth analysis of demographic statistics from the British Phonographic Industry and ABC figures for several magazines, and read more like an internal briefing paper than a newspaper feature – which, as it now turns out, it effectively was.

Last week Guardian Media Group announced that it had taken a 14 percent strategic stake in Development Hell, and is now one of the company's major shareholders.

BUSH SPELLS IT OUT



***NEW Statesman* editor Peter Wilby chose an interesting headline for John Kampfner's interview with David Blunkett two weeks ago: "The home secretary says of his colleagues 'we sink or swim together': none should presume on taking another person's job." Might this by any chance refer to Kampfner's own ceaseless campaign – chronicled by the *Eye* – to take Wilby's job?**

For several months Kampfner has been sounding out *NS* colleagues as to where their loyalties might lie when he stages his putsch – though with very little success so far. One *NS* hack was accosted by the ambitious political pundit in the pub recently and asked three questions. Do you think Wilby is over the hill? Will you say so to owner Geoffrey Robinson? And will you support me as his successor? Alas, all three were answered in the negative.

Meanwhile Robinson himself has been giving friends his assessment of the situation. Wilby, he says, is "totally safe" until the general election. After that, there are several possible candidates, including Polly Toynbee (whom Geoffrey calls "perfect"), Jackie Ashley ("great contacts, and a Brownite"), Rosie Boycott ("lots of experience, and a fine-looking woman") and teenage columnist Johann Hari ("brilliant but probably too young, and Pilger hates him").

But what of John Kampfner? "I might have to give it to him, but I am loath to," Robinson confides. He fears that Kampfner is "an insufferable arse-licker".

RICHARD "Dirty" Desmond, chairman of the *Star* and *Express* titles, likes saving money even more than he enjoys making it. His latest ingenious scheme is to move much of the operation to India to save on costs, prompting his pressurised staff to call their titles the *Daily Sitar* and the *Delhi Express* – though *Bangalore Express* might be more accurate.

Dirty Des, who already gets a lot of his subbing done cheaply in the northern town of Broughton, sees a relocation to India as a natural money-saving progression, following the lead of the NHS blood-screening service and countless British call centres. He often warns sub-editors of his plans to move them all there while he is inspecting the front pages of an evening.

Since conditions in the Grey Lubyanka already resemble some of the less well-established Indian cities – lavatories out of order for weeks, towels not changed for days, etc – it can only be an improvement.

Meanwhile, perplexed by a glut of left-over crap CDs from recent promotions, Des has had another brilliant brainwave: give them away again! The latest promotions in the *Express* and *Star* encourage readers to get their fave titles delivered to their door in return for a "free CD". The luckless fools don't have a say in which one they get, and may have already have it from the first time round – it's pot luck until the records are all gone.

Bearing in mind the quality of these CDs – which feature three or four tracks you may have heard and 10 or 12 you definitely haven't – this offer could be running for several years to come. If all else fails, the next promotion may turn out to be: FREE SHINY SILVER COASTER FOR EVERY READER.

HAS NO ONE told *Daily Telegraph* editor Martin Newland that the Barclay twins take a rather fierce line on "invasions of privacy"?

Apparently not. Last Tuesday, page 3 of the *Hurleygraph* was dominated by gorgeous pouting 17-year-old tennis champ Maria Sharapova, photographed unawares in a bikini "on the beach near her home in Longboat Key, Florida". The tenuous justification for running this long-lens paparazzo pic was that the bikini in question looked like one from Marks & Sparks, whose new chief executive had announced plans to revitalise the company.

Since David and Frederick Barclay once sued the *Observer* for mentioning their date of birth, and Aidan Barclay is now issuing legal threats against the *Evening Standard* merely because it reported that he has a house in London, it seems unlikely that the new proprietors will tolerate much more of this. Or do they, as we wondered in the last *Eye*, have one rule for themselves and another for everyone else?

THE possibility that Celtic player Neil Lennon might return to the Northern Ireland football team two years after quitting over death threats prompted the Scottish *News of the World* to recall some of the hatred that had been shown to the player in the province.

The paper printed a large picture of chanting matchgoers captioned "HATE MOB — Northern Ireland fans turned on Celtic star Lennon and taunted him during games".

Unfortunately the picture in question was of a group of supporters who travelled to a Scottish match in September 2002 to encourage Lennon to stay — something that was quite evident from the 20ft long banner reading "Northern Ireland fans support Neil Lennon" which the *NOTW* cropped out of the picture so it would fit its story.

IN A desperate attempt to discover why everyone buys the *Daily Mail* and no one buys his paper, *Daily Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill somehow managed to dig up four *Express* readers and ask them for their views on the subject.

They sat in a room with four much-easier-to-find *Daily Mail* readers. Together they all studied both titles page by page under management's watchful gaze.

The *Mail* readers pointed out everything they love about their deranged newspaper and explained why it pissed all over Hill's meagre offering on every front. The *Express* readers, after carefully assessing all their tawdry rag had to offer, said that they hadn't realised what they were missing and would be switching allegiance immediately. So that's another four *Express* readers lost!

Purple-faced Hill was later spotted berating his under-staffed, under-budgeted hacks, throwing copies of the *Mail* at them and inviting them to see how the job should be done.

SPEAKER Michael Martin's almost complete silence over the use he, his wife and daughter make of his parliamentary allowances and perks is not unusual. The Commons is always uneasy about investigations into the financial affairs of its senior members.

Following allegations in the *Mail on Sunday*, Martin simply issued a statement confirming that he employs his wife. One reason for the near silence may be what is known as the Dagenham Defence — otherwise known as "they all do it". There is nothing to stop MPs employing their families at the taxpayers' expense and many do; and in the European parliament the practice is even more widespread.

The issue came to the surface at Westminster in 1999 when the then parliamentary standards commissioner Elizabeth Filkin opened an investigation into the hiring of close family at public expense by two Scottish MPs: John Reid and John Maxton. She concluded that the way they had employed their relatives was not in accordance with the rules, but her ruling was rejected by MPs on the standards committee.

Mr Maxton, as he then was, apologised to Mrs Filkin for the brusque way he had dealt with her inquiries. The two MPs then went from strength to strength. Reid is now health secretary and Maxton has been elevated to the Lords. Many MPs now recall the waspish comments of speaker Martin about Mrs Filkin and her inquiry. She was not offered a further contract and left her job in circumstances which, she felt, amounted to being forced out.

The hazards of MPs employing their sons were dramatically revealed in 2002 when Malcolm Bell, 20, son of Stuart Bell, Labour MP for Middlesbrough, was sent to a young offenders' institution for 60 days after being convicted of stealing cheques from his father's fellow MPs while working for his father at public expense as a researcher. Mr Bell answers to parliament on church matters, and his friend Philip Mawer, general-secretary of the synod of the Church of England, replaced Mrs Filkin as parliamentary standards commissioner.

Mr Speaker Martin would not tell the *Mail on Sunday* how much taxpayers' money he pays his wife and daughter, but it is almost certainly more than is paid to his friend Barry Reamsbottom, former general secretary of the civil servants' union PCS, who has often found the time to visit the Speaker in his luxurious (and free) lodgings in the Commons and help him out with his constituency work. According to last week's *MoS*, the Commons Fees Office gives Reamsbottom £5,000 a year for this work. But when the *Eye* asked about payment in 2002 (see *Eye* 1061) the Speaker's spokesman said Mr Reamsbottom wasn't paid a penny.

Number crunchings

400 miles

■Range of '45-minute' weapons of mass destruction reported after government dossier in September 2002

5,000 metres

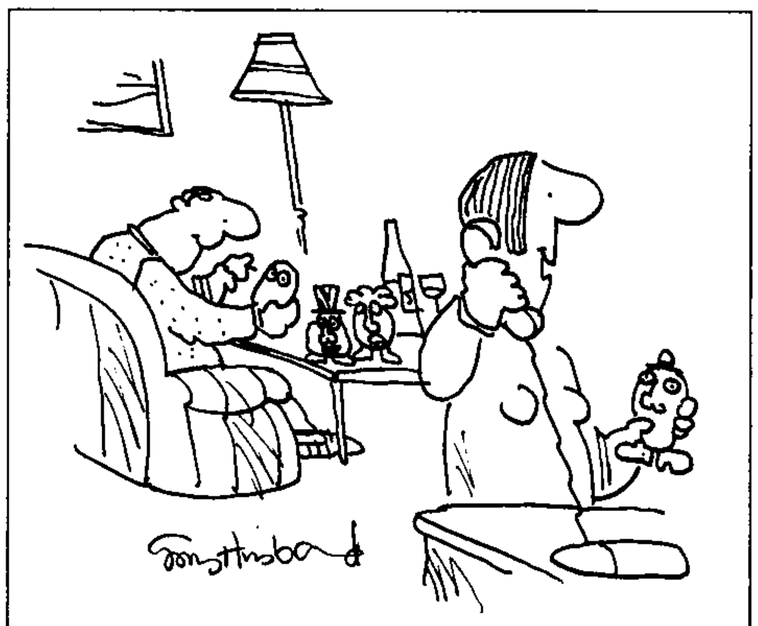
■Actual range of battlefield munitions to which intelligence referred

GORDON BROWN's announcement of 104,000 civil service job losses in last week's spending review caused whimpers across Whitehall.

Certainly a subdued mood was evident on the Civil Service recruitment gateway website (www.careers.civil-service.gov.uk), which in the five days following Mr Brown's announcement only managed to post the following job vacancies:

"A number of lawyers of various grades" in the government legal service; an assistant secretary to the minister without portfolio; an assistant director of policy (policy delivery) for the crown prosecution service; a web editor-in-chief, senior web editor, two web editors, a senior economic statistics press officer and "a number of personal assistants" for the office of national statistics; a head of the Scottish environment and rural affairs department, marketing officer (horticulture) and "a number of procurement and senior procurement officers" for the Scottish executive; a chief nursing officer for the department of health; a "range of senior managers" in the department for international development"; an assistant director for the national offender management service; a part-time management support officer for the deer commission for Scotland; a project manager and group support administrator for the defence science and technology laboratory; a publishing contract and marketing manager, design and publishing manager, project manager trainer, training team leader and two support officers at the office of government commerce; a customer and acquisition director in the department for work and pensions; and a consolidation account and consolidation manager in HM treasury.

But the safest bet might be in the cabinet office which is seeking an unspecified number of recruits for "a pool of people with an interest in delivering HR within government departments". As well as "implementing new service delivery strategies and outsourcing developing business partnership relationships between HR and stakeholders" they will presumably spend much of their time… firing everyone else.



"Do we fancy going for a drink? No thanks, we're staying in making potato men"

LEAKED Downing Street memos recently revealed that the home office was wasting £100m a year paying to keep thousands of homes around the country empty.

They were taken on to government books to accommodate asylum seekers who never materialised; and the inefficient national asylum support service (NASS) never bothered to insert a workable get-out clause into rental contracts in case the homes proved surplus to requirements. Insiders say the real cost to taxpayers of NASS's cock-up over the past four years is much higher even than the leak suggests.

NAFF was introduced with such haste that its aim – to get local authorities to provide all accommodation – failed. Private contractors were then happy to fill the gap – and line their pockets. While home office officials in London thought the deals they were securing around the country were a bargain, they did not realise that rents were in fact a fraction of the prices they were agreeing to pay.

WHATEVER happened to the 7,000 new homes in seven "Millennium Communities", promised by deputy prime minister John Prescott back in the bright new dawn of July 1997?

These new sustainable communities in deprived areas of London, Leeds, Manchester, Kings Lynn, Telford, Milton Keynes and Hastings were to be built to the highest environmental standards and exemplify design for social inclusion.

Seven years on, here's last month's update on the Millennium Communities programme from the office of the deputy prime minister: "Up to the end of April 2004, 668 dwellings have been completed or are under construction." All 668 are at Greenwich, south-east London.

The project is in the hands of national regeneration agency English Partnerships and was originally scheduled to be take between seven and ten years to complete. Now the estimated completion date is as late as 2012.

Back in 1999 minister Richard Caborn announced that homes at the Allerton Bywater development in Leeds would be available in 2000. The latest news is that "work has commenced on site and should be completed by 2009."

MORE detail has emerged on Michael Gove, Surrey Heath's soon-to-be Tory MP, and his infamous night out in Aberdeen in 1990 (see last *Eye*).

The evening ended, it seems, with not one but *two* traffic cones being slung from a viaduct. The future *Times* commentator, attempting to flee the scene, was given a verbal dressing down by the rozzers but managed to escape a night in the cells.

Of course all this was a long time ago. And as recently as June this year, law 'n' order Gove wrote an article calling for "zealous pursuit of offences such as street loutishness which damage the quality of urban life". How true!

IT IS always a pleasure when an *Eye* story eventually makes the local newspapers, so congratulations to the *Argus* in Sussex for its article Conflict of Interest? on 9 July.

It was illustrated by a huge picture of Nicholas "Fatty" Soames, the Tory MP for Mid-Sussex, standing at the gate to a field. The article contained the news, first broken in *Eye* 1106, that Mr Soames is very much opposed to the building of 90 homes at Folders Farm, Burgess Hill, by the builder Crest Nicholson; and that Mr Soames is the paid chairman of the Framlington Second Dual Trust whose shareholders include Crest Nicholson, builder of the houses at Folders Farm.

Fatty is quoted as saying: "If they [Framlington] do own shares, they own just a few thousand." He concludes: "There is absolutely no conflict of interest." Framlington's annual report shows that the trust owns 400,000 shares in Crest Nicholson, worth £1,122,0000, or 2.26 percent of the total. The trust's investment manager Paul Branigan says in his report that the investment in Crest Nicholson is a "key holding".

IN MARCH 2002 Yukos, the Russian oil company, appointed Lord Owen as its international chairman.

Interviewed in the company's in-house magazine, Dr Death pronounced himself delighted, since "Yukos is one of Russia's most innovative and dynamic companies"; and he predicted that "the company is sure to keep on its upward course". He was full of praise for the company's chief executive, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, commenting that: "I was impressed by how young the company managers are, and also by their enthusiasm."

Two years on Khodorkovsky is in jail facing fraud charges, and the Kremlin has sent in bailiffs to try to recover $3.4bn in unpaid taxes from the company. As Owen so sagely remarked when he was appointed: "When you are talking about vision, you are talking about the future. And the future is something that concerns everyone."

BY-ELECTION SPECIAL

ARDENT BLAIRITE and IT consultant Liam Byrne is being hailed by the Dear Leader as proof that a candidate who is as tough as he is on anti-social behaviour can win a by-election for "new" Labour (in Birmingham Hodge Hill), whereas the anti-war candidate in Leicester South, Sir Peter Soulsby, lost to the Lib Dems.

However, the robotic Byrne only scraped home by 450 votes in a seat Labour used to hold more than comfortably. Soulsby, on the other hand, faced a much tougher fight. Not only did Number 10 seek to block his candidature, but the party had been so badly trounced in local elections it only retained two council seats in the south of the city.

Byrne has got off to a good start telling the BBC that he was "proud to work in Millbank towards Labour's historic 1997 election victory". What he forgot to mention was that he was controversially seconded to Labour from the highly reputable, er, Andersen Consulting – now labouring under the more user-friendly name, Accenture.

IT HASN'T been an easy few weeks for Nicola "Nokia" Davies, council liaison manager for the Mobile Phone Operators Association, and (just) failed Lib Dem candidate at the Birmingham Hodge Hill by-election.

Labour activists were quick to exploit her day-job, describing her as a "mobile phone mast spin doctor with an office in London". Lib Dems complained that Labour had been contacting colleagues and friends of Ms Davies in an effort to dig dirt. But the Lib Dems are not averse to a bit of dirty trickery themselves.

Davies's campaign produced different election leaflets for different ethnic audiences. In the predominantly Muslim Washwood Heath ward, Davies's leaflet featured a picture of her and Charles Kennedy surrounded by Asian voters, while in the mainly white Ward End area her leaflets showed the pair surrounded by placards next to a post office threatened with closure.

Labour hit back with massive wild-west-style posters of Davies complete with "Not Wanted" (ho

"Some you lose, some you lose"

ho) strap line. Kennedy denounced this as "negative campaigning". Such stunts were a sure sign that Labour feared losing its safe seat, he declared.

The Lib Dems' foothold on the moral high ground quickly gave way, however. When anti-phone mast campaigner Eileen O'Connor approached the Lib Dem leader she found herself pushed and shoved by a phalanx of activists. "All I wanted to do was tell Charles Kennedy that he had got the wrong candidate," she tearfully told reporters, "but I was subjected to physical and verbal abuse. I have only ever voted Liberal Democrat, so I cannot believe that this has happened to me."

She wasn't the only one. Instead of stuffing envelopes and delivering leaflets, a number of party members in the constituency held a ceremonial burning of their party membership cards. Many of the 460 votes by which Davies missed victory undoubtedly belonged to party members and supporters who stayed away in disgust at the party's choice of candidate.

Around the country Lib Dems have been very active in anti-mobile phone mast campaigns and have used the issue to recruit new members. GLA member Lynne Featherstone, currently supporting campaigners against a mast in north London, said in a recent newsletter: "Lib Dems say that many legitimate concerns remain over health risks associated with mobile phone masts." One of which is losing by-elections.

SUCH was Labour's desperation in Leicester South that its candidate had not one but two title and name changes during the campaign.

As the former leader of Leicester city council, the wannabe MP began the campaign in full pomp as "Sir Peter Soulsby". But as time went on he was transformed by apparatchiks to plain "Peter Soulsby"; and it wasn't long before he was the even plainer and prolier "Pete Soulsby".

Soulsby was kept well away from the media and was left opening and closing his mouth like a fish as his election minder, John "the hammer" Reid, barged into an interview with *Newsnight*'s Michael Crick and answered all the questions for him.

Labour's disastrous performance in the city has caused shockwaves in the neighbouring constituency represented by trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt. If the Lib Dems can do it in one part of the city, they could just do it in Patsy's patch too.

THE thousand or so electors of Leicester South who voted for Respect candidate and former Taliban prisoner Yvonne Ridley might have thought twice had they read a recent article by the ex-*Express* journalist on an Islamic website, where she compared Al Qaeda to the International Brigades.

"I had the privilege recently of meeting some brothers who fought in Afghanistan against America and Britain", wrote la Ridley. "No doubt if the authorities knew their identity they would be wearing orange jump suits by now squatting in cages in Guantanamo Bay. One thing that struck me about these brothers was how principled they were – going on jihad for ideals… The driving force that led them into the mountains and caves of Tora Bora was no different to that which propelled 2,800 men AND women from the United States to fight in the Spanish civil war." Perhaps la Ridley can count herself lucky that she isn't in orange overalls, squatting in a cage in Guantanamo Bay.

Number Crunchings

-75% ■ Reduction in number of homeless people on streets since Labour came to power

+50% ■ Increase in number of homeless families in temporary accommodation since Labour came to power

SNAIL MAIL...

ROYAL MAIL is awaiting an estimated £70m fine from regulator Postcomm for its shoddy postal service, missing all 15 of its performance targets this year. But that's no comfort to people in Tower Hamlets, where the service makes pisspoor deliveries elsewhere look positively efficient.

Hacks at the council-funded newsletter *East End Life* say they have been "inundated" with reports of disappearing and dumped mail. Missing items of post have turned up in bins or the street. One resident told the paper he had rescued piles of obviously undelivered letters from a communal dustbin near his home, but when he reported this, Royal Mail didn't bother to send anyone to investigate or retrieve them. People living in blocks of flats have found their mail in sacks abandoned in the lift.

Cheque books, credit cards, birthday cards and gifts, job interview invitations and hospital appointments have all gone astray. One woman discovered a parcel, three weeks late, in her toilet. It had been shoved through her bathroom window.

Royal Mail blames agency staff helping the usual delivery team during the introduction of the single daily delivery system. Back in April it pledged that the service in Tower Hamlets would get back to its normal low standard soon, but two months later the East End's post remains a disaster. "We have had to go back and review some of the changes we have made to delivery rounds. So we ask customers to bear with us as we sort out teething problems," said a spokeswoman.

East End Life is forwarding the entire catalogue of complaints to Royal Mail chief Adam Crozier. Maybe he'll find time to read it in between making 13,000 staff redundant and plotting the predicted £400m profit for next year – just so long as it isn't sent by post.

...HATE MAIL

FURIOUS at all the fawning coverage given to Bill Clinton's memoirs, the *Daily Mail* decided to counter-attack by serialising *Hillary Exposed*, Christopher Andersen's hatchet job on the ex-president's wife.

The *Mail* went straight for the jugular with excerpts from Andersen's book alleging that the Clintons had overseen a systematic campaign of vandalism and pillage when they left the White House in 2001. "Wouldn't it be hysterical," Hillary was said to have asked staff, "if someone just happened to remove all the Ws from the computer keyboards?"

An unnamed White House employee compared La Clinton's exit to "watching Imelda Marcos stuff furs and jewellery into a pillowcase as she was getting ready to flee the presidential palace". Further accusations raised by Andersen and the *Mail* included the charge that the Clintons stripped the Presidential jet bare of any valuables and that Al Gore's wife, Tipper, was so embarrassed by this rapacity she called up the incoming Bush administration to apologise.

Unfortunately, not a word of this was true as the *Mail* could have checked very quickly. In 2001, when these allegations first surfaced, the congressional general accounting office instigated its own inquiry and "found no evidence of damage" to the premises, while the White House curator acknowledged that cataloguing errors had led to certain gifts being wrongly delivered to the Clintons.

Nor had staff at Andrews Air Base uncovered any sabotage or grand larceny on board the presidential jet. As for Tipper Gore's apology, that too was pure invention. Even the Bush administration no longer tries to defend any of this. Was this what David Blunkett had in mind when he saluted *Mail* editor Paul Dacre last year for reflecting "the best of journalism"?

JUST FANCY THAT

WAS the Queen thinking of Sir Winston Churchill perhaps when she spoke at last week's official opening of the Princess Diana memorial puddle in Hyde Park?

Churchill, taking receipt of a highly unflattering portrait by Graham Sutherland, described the work as a "remarkable" piece of modern art. Was it merely a coincidence that Brenda described the erstwhile Princess of Hearts simply as a "remarkable person"?

TV

The Secret Agent (BBC1)

EVERY journalism school there has ever been chisels into the heads of its students on day one that ancient saying: dog bites man isn't news, man bites dog is. So you have to wonder just where the makers of recent undercover documentaries learned their trade. Film-makers are using television's most dangerous and difficult techniques to prove things we already knew.

Ever since Donal McIntyre risked his life to demonstrate that football hooligans were nasty, racist thugs, we've been waiting for this investigative zeal to prove other truisms: Bears In Woods Don't Use Public Lavatories or Man In White Hat In Vatican Not A Protestant. The one benefit of the post-Hutton nervousness at the BBC is that they're still waiting for more sources on those stories; but, last Thursday, a hugely expensive and heavily promoted documentary reached an equally expected conclusion. **The Secret Agent** employed surreptitious filming to prove that members of the British National Party are deeply prejudiced against Jewish and black people and that its leader, Nick Griffin, believes Islam to be a vile and dangerous religion.

The point about undercover filming is that it is generally used — and permitted by broadcasting regulators — only when it's the only way of showing a gap between public and private behaviour. A man insists in interview that he's running a fish and chip business but a reporter posing as a part-time fryer is able to prove with hidden cameras that the cod is just a cover for the shipping of arms.

This justification applied to last year's documentary from the same team: *The Secret Policeman*, singled out by the BBC governors in last week's annual report as one of the year's best factual programmes. The police force was publicly insisting that it has reformed and tried to drive out racists. Any chief constable interviewed on TV would insist that the bad apples had been sacked and that new recruits are sent on cultural diversity courses. It was therefore proper to test this claim against the private reality — and shocking when it was revealed that young entrants to the force were unreconstructed bigots.

But, when it comes to *The Secret Agent*, neither the justification nor the end-product match. Is there a single television viewer in Britain who thinks that the British National Party is not a racist organisation which attracts racists? Did anyone vote for the BNP in recent elections under the impression that it was a pro-Islamic outfit? Therefore could anyone possibly be surprised by what was revealed in the film?

The producers might argue that Nick Griffin has been trying to sanitise the BNP and that he is careful in public speeches and interviews not to make statements which risk litigation or a broadcasting ban. But both the supporters and the enemies of the BNP well understand that he is speaking within restraints and that a quite different rhetoric will be employed on doorsteps and at private rallies. Proving this general assumption didn't merit an hour of television.

More worryingly, it's possible that, though this was never remotely the film-makers' intention, *The Secret Agent* may have won some support for the organisation being exposed. By making such a fuss about Griffin's comments on Islam, the documentary connected the party with the racial prejudice which many in the general electorate do not consider bigotry.

Although it would ideally not be the case, many voters who now accept that anti-semitic and anti-black comments are socially unallowable believe that some degree of what liberals call "Islamophobia" is an inevitable response to Osama bin Laden's campaign of terrorism against the west. As Griffin was able to say in a follow-up interview on *Newsnight*, even columnists in the *Guardian* have echoed the general tenor of his remarks on the threat of Islam.

Failing editorially, *The Secret Agent* was also unable to justify itself technically. The reasons undercover filming should be used sparingly are as much practical as moral: the sub-CCTV pictures and sound which always has to be subtitled are hard for the viewer to endure. Reporting what the mind already knew, *The Secret Agent* wasn't worth the effort for eyes or ears.

'Remote Controller'

GOING LIVE

AT 10.30pm on the eve of publication of the Butler report, ITN went live to Downing Street for an urgent bulletin from Nick Robinson, who was alone and in the dark.

So were the viewers. "Tonight I'll be piecing together what I think Lord Butler will say tomorrow," he revealed helpfully.

MEDIA NEWS

THE quest for public value continues at the BBC where "costs must come down and efficiency improve", according to a toadying article in *Ariel*.

"Has the BBC become too big, as many of its critics and rivals are saying?" it asks. "The response at the most senior levels is 'we intend to find out'."

Get ready for yet another gravy train carrying management consultants tasked with investigating such inefficiencies as, say, yet more exercises in management consultancy. As ever it will be carried out by outsiders paid by licence-payers but who know bugger-all about broadcasting.

With no sense of irony, a new "Head of Value for Money" has already been created to oversee the task, along with someone identified in *Ariel* only as "a merchant banker". He or she will be sure to push for more privatisation in the corporation (as the BBC negotiates a £2bn contract with Siemens Business Services, which will be handed the BBC Technology division on a plate).

MARK THOMPSON, the BBC's new director-general, communicates with BBC staff via a simple weekly email which has generated much positive reaction.

Could this mean an end to the Beeb's massive internal communications industry, in which people whom nobody has ever heard of create thousands of web pages for "Making It Happen" and "One BBC" – not to mention the endless newsletters and glossy corporate communications that travel directly from pigeon hole to skip?

Probably not.

"AUDIENCE perception of BBC Three and BBC Four is registered as 'too low' despite greater reach by the digital channels", according to the BBC governors.

Nonetheless the BBC continues to throw money into this digital void. The latest plan is to launch *Ten O'Clock News Extra* in the autumn on Freeview and digital: "It will give added depth and context to the Ten with longer interviews, extra footage and background".

But will it be any good? If this really is an example of the new "public value" broadcasting, the added depth, etc, should perhaps be on BBC1's *Ten* bulletin where far more licence-payers might watch it.

"WHAT is it about alternative therapies that so bewitches the film stars"? asks a hack as we look at glamorous pictures of Gwyneth Paltrow.

Was this an item from *Hello!* perhaps? No; it was a report on BBC Two's flagship news and current affairs programme, *Newsnight* by reporter David Sells.

WHERE HE BREAKS NEW GROUND WITH THE CHAT SHOW FORMAT...
ALASTAIR CAMPBELL INTERVIEWS
THAT'S INNOVATIVE...
AND COMES UP WITH THE ONCE THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE...
BY MAKING GRAHAM NORTON LOOK GOOD
"It's New Labourious"
"It needs sexing up"
"It's a spin off"
"OFF in 45 minutes, Mr Campbell!"
KenPyne

AD NAUSEAM

ANOTHER week, another risqué French Connection ad campaign. A poster ad for its radio station, FCUK FM, has just been censured by the advertising standards authority (ASA), which is so fed up with French Connection's repeated contraventions that henceforth its posters will have to be pre-vetted by the ASA's copy advice team.

Seasoned FCUK-watchers may recall that more than three years ago, *Eye* 1026 noted that "for deliberately, persistently and rather tediously flouting the rules, all French Connection posters now have to be pre-vetted". How did this one slip through?

Under ASA rules "pre-vetted" means pre-vetted for two years. And so from 2001 there was no ASA adjudication on French Connection… for two years. Since the pre-vetting was lifted last year, there have been five separate adjudications, four of which have been upheld by the ASA. Or to paraphrase: French Connection is taking the piss.

On the back of 540 complaints over seven years, the ASA has repeatedly warned French Connection against using Fcuk where it could be interpreted as Fuck. As the Fcuk/fuck misinterpretation is the kernel of French Connection's entire marketing campaign, plainly it is not going to stop using it.

The minute the pre-vetting ended French Connection started flouting the codes, obviously quivering in its boots at the prospect of another of the ASA's piddling reprimands. If it cannot follow the code of practice set down by the industry, isn't is time French Connection was properly punished? The ASA has the power to refuse advertising space. If it wants to prove it has teeth before taking over the regulation of all advertising later this year, now would be a good time to use that power.

SO WHY did Will Harris leave his role last week as marketing director at Conservative central office after just nine months?

Was it because his "Let Down by Labour" campaign for the local and European elections was itself a big let-down? Was it because when he asked the public to come up with the Tories' next ad campaign (*Eye* 1106) some wondered if that wasn't what he was being paid £150,000 for? Or was it because the Tories' rebrand is due at the end of this month, ditching the flaming torch for one of Will's creations. Could it really be that bad?

JUNKET OF THE WEEK

THE new Lexus RX400h is, its makers claim, their most environmentally-friendly luxury car yet.

Its hybrid motor uses electricity to cut down on petrol consumption, its emissions are "ultra-low", and it even uses recycled materials in its interior – not, the company claims, "because of government mandates, but out of genuine respect and concern for the planet. *All of it* matters – since this is the only planet we've got, and we'd better make it last."

So what is the ideal way to launch this "saviour of the SUV market" to the world's motoring press? Naturally to fly dozens of hacks to Hawaii, the only environment where the environmental friendliness of the car can properly be appreciated. Sadly, neither the planes which will carry the journalists nor the ships which will deliver the cars this September work on environmentally-friendly fuels like the Lexus – but these are small matters when the company is, as it points out, "clearly at the forefront of environmental efforts in the world automotive community".

6.30 Hollyoaks. The relationship between Mandy and Tony deteriorates further (T) (281)

The Times

MYRA HINDLEY may be dead but at least some valiant souls are determined to keep her memory alive. As we accurately predicted in December 2002 (*Eye* 1068), it hasn't taken long for BBC producer Duncan Staff to make another programme about the manipulative murderess.

He has just finished making *The Tartan Album*, which sounds like a tabloid-esque trawl through the private papers Hindley left behind – and which no doubt he will invest with profound importance.

Staff spent much time cultivating a mutually advantageous relationship with the demented creature, which resulted in a documentary about her failed campaign to be released. It provoked outrage among the families of the victims who believed the BBC was simply pandering to her penchant for self-publicity.

A subsequent farcical film about a failed "forensic" search of the moor for the one remaining murder victim prompted ridicule from those who knew anything about the case – not least because many of them think there is no body there.

And of course all this tawdry drivel has been accompanied by acres of newsprint in the *Guardian* – which, while deploring the tabloids' obsession with Hindley, seems to wallow in the grim details of her unsavoury life more than even the most sensational Fleet Street tabloid.

"Is there a choice of superbugs?"

SO farewell then, Richard Littlejohn, whose third presenting job with Sky television ended on 8 July in the same manner as the first two – with the station insisting he had done a "fantastic job" but declining to continue paying him hundreds of thousands of pounds a year for his services.

"We are very proud of what he has achieved. The move comes ahead of a repositioning of Sky News during peaktime," insisted Sky Networks MD Dawn Airey. This will presumably be completely unlike the "wide-ranging revamp of our early evening output" which the station announced in January 2003 – a cornerstone of which was the hiring of… Richard Littlejohn!

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Coconut milk – the new tinned tomatoes." — *Good Housekeeping.*

"Chickpeas – the new baked beans." — *Good Housekeeping.*

"Failure is the new success." — Quentin Willson, *Loose Women*, ITV.

"Harissa – the new pesto." — *Good Housekeeping.*

"Bathrooms are the new kitchens." — *Superhomes*, BBC2.

"Galaxy formation. Old is the new young." — Cover of venerable scientific journal *Nature.*

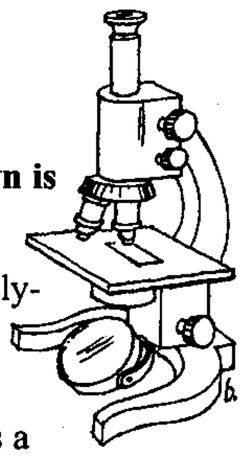
"Roasted peppers – the new sun-dried tomatoes." — *Good Housekeeping.*

"Are the British the new Germans?" — Richard Evans, Radio 5 Live.

"Dried figs – the new raisins." — *Good Housekeeping.*

"Rural. Is it the new urban?" — *Hip-Hop Connection* magazine.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



THE new money promised to British science by Gordon Brown is most welcome.

Currently Britain spends far less than its competitors on publicly-funded science and this needs to change: every country which has made scientific research a public-spending priority has prospered as a result.

But what exactly is this money – about £1bn extra a year by 2008 – going to be spent on? An ominous sentence in the spending review does not inspire confidence. The research councils have been told to "develop a comprehensive, integrated and efficient performance management system". But what does this mean?

"Management systems" may excite business studies graduates but they aren't going to whet the appetites of the Darwins and Newtons of the future. Where are the new projects? Where is the excitement? Where is the drive to develop new products, discover new drugs and explore the cosmos?

It'll be interesting to see if Britain commits to Europe's Aurora programme, an ambitious series of missions to explore Mars. Currently Britain's space programme is smaller than that of, er, Belgium. Although it failed, Beagle 2 showed that there is a great deal of enthusiasm for science in this country.

If the government really wants to get Britain interested in science, it will have to try harder to make more kids keen to go on to do science at university. Increasing the golden handshake for trainee science teachers from £4k to £5k isn't exactly going to get Britain's best and most inspiring physicists and microbiologists clamouring for a place at the chalkface.

'Boffin'

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

DONATELLA VERSACE'S DAUGHTER INHERITS £137 MILLION FORTUNE
MUM····IT'S INCREDIBLE TO HAVE SO MUCH MONEY!!!
···I CAN NEARLY AFFORD— A VERSACE OUTFIT!!!
WHOAA-STEADY ON, ···YOU DIDN'T GET THAT MUCH!!!

DOING THE ROUNDS

ACCORDING to one source at the department of health, "new" Labour's flagship health reform, Shifting The Balance Of Power, is nicknamed Shifting The Blame to Other People. This would be fair enough if hospitals and primary care trusts (PCTs) had the freedom to make their own mistakes; but for all the promises of devolution and autonomy, political interference in local NHS decisions is still rife.

PCTs are supposedly free to do their own commissioning on behalf of patients. But what if their decisions go against the government's desire to attract private contractors into the NHS? Non-executive directors at South West Oxfordshire PCT claim they have received threats and inappropriate pressure from Thames Valley strategic health authority and Whitehall. Their crime has been to reject the services of a mobile ophthalmic treatment centre, owned by the private South African firm Netcare UK, and their punishment would be a "surcharge" if the deal fell through as a result.

The PCT chair Professor Brian Avis and non-executive director Jane Hanna have now quit their posts, an increasingly common scenario, according to Dr Michael Dixon of the NHS Alliance. "Some PCTs are talking privately about coercion and outright bullying by their strategic health authorities. SHAs appear to misunderstand the difference between performance management, which is their role, and instructing how services should be commissioned and provided, which is not."

Alas, the performance management system itself is flawed and simplistic, with PCTs and hospitals suffering hugely with the drop of a star. MD recently gave a speech at the two-star East Sussex Hospitals NHS trust, where the patient care is often excellent, and yet a failure to balance the books means that this year it may not get any stars at all. This is also true of MD's three nearest trusts in Bristol and Bath. None has a star, all are in debt and all have some truly excellent services. To survive, they need to attract custom under the new Payment By Results scheme, and yet some patients refuse to go near them because of the lack of stars.

Even more absurd is the knock-on effect of a lost star. The Royal National Orthopaedic hospital (RNOH) is currently under investigation for allegedly fixing its waiting list. Like all hospitals, it is under huge central pressure to hit its targets, gain three stars and become a foundation trust. If the fiddling charges stick, it will end up with none. However, the RNOH is a specialist centre and 75 PCTs commission from it nationwide. One of the nine key targets for the PCT star ratings is to ensure no patient breaches the waiting list times. So many of the PCTs who sent patients to the RNOH could also lose a star, even if they had no control over the fiddling. Everyone gets blamed and punished – well, everyone apart from the ministers who implemented the idiotically simplistic star system in the first place.

Other PCTs may soon cease to exist, irrespective of their star ratings. Hampshire and Isle of Wight SHA (£9.2m in the red last year) is considering merging its seven PCTs into three "clusters" to ensure a "focus on targets and sustainability". Other SHAs are considering similar upheavals, making a mockery of local decision-making. PCTs will merge and become as detached from the frontline as the health authorities they replaced.

PCTs have enough on their plate without the threat of further reorganisation. Balancing the ruthless "rewards and penalties" of the government's reforms with the needs of patients and stress levels of NHS staff is a near impossible task. As Bob Ricketts, the DoH's head of NHS "capacity, plurality and choice" (sic), told a recent conference: "I wouldn't want to be working in a PCT in the next two years."

MD

off your trolley REEVE & WAY

SIGNAL FAILURES

THE government's latest plan for the rail industry suggests the end is nigh for the bizarre experiment of putting accountants, rather than rail managers and engineers, in charge of a rail network. But it remains to be seen whether Whitehall civil servants, who will have a bigger role running the railway, are any more competent.

Railtrack was the supreme example of what happens when accountants are in charge. Then having replaced Failtrack with Network Rail (led by engineers), "new" Labour appointed another accountant, Richard Bowker, to chair its "strategic" rail authority.

The accountants were reluctant to put people experienced at running railways into the top jobs. There were competent managers who could have become the SRA's chief executive; but Bowker instead chose an accountant, er, himself. People with the know-how therefore had to be engaged as consultants by Railtrack, the SRA et al. But consultants are never accountable for the consequences of their advice and they're expensive: the government spent £53m on them last year (including £26m of SRA contracts).

Genuine rail managers who refused to become consultants have been largely confined to train franchises. The latest rail reforms will tie franchisees' hands, ensuring contracts are tightly specified with little room for innovation. For that to work the industry needs real rail managers to fill the key posts at the centre (especially within Network Rail and the transport department). But last week's white paper makes no such promise.

"NEW" Labour's reforms also risk making operations markedly subordinate to engineering, where ideally they should be evenly balanced.

This happened before under British Rail and it is almost happening again now as Network Rail shuts chunks of route for days, weeks or months to get on with its engineering uninterrupted. That's better than Railtrack's minimal engineering to save money; but it frustrates passengers and freight companies.

NR will gain extra powers, notably for "setting timetables". But since it has no direct contact with passengers or freight customers, it has little idea of commercial reality. It demands ridiculous sums for projects to bring more freight on to the railway, instead of doing the jobs quickly and at cost so it gets more income from the resulting freight trains.

Some of its long-term route closures have driven away the railway's local clientele. Train operators, and therefore passengers, are sometimes not told until a day or two before what services NR's engineers are allowing on weekends. NR's record doesn't inspire confidence in its ability to produce customer-friendly timetables.

The national network needs central planning. That's obvious from the shambles of the last decade, when preparing each new timetable took more than a year of squabbling by rail firms. But "new" Labour proposes to preserve the Berlin wall between engineering and operations simply to prolong the daft concept of franchising passenger operations to a ragbag of private firms. But franchising undermines the network's coherence and wastes money: in the last three years £41m has been squandered on selecting franchisees (and untold millions have been spent by bidders, to be recouped from fares and subsidy).

MOVING the railway inspectorate (RI) out of the health and safety executive (HSE) is another overdue change, but transport secretary Alistair Darling won't bring it back into the transport department.

The HSE has refused to let the appalling record of the road system – the main alternative to rail – influence its often unrealistic demands for tighter rail safety (*Eyes passim*). The government's decision to transfer oversight of safety to the rail-regulation office should at least ensure the financial consequences of safety demands are recognised. But there's still no guarantee rail safety will be taken from its watertight compartment so that money isn't poured into rail schemes for negligible safety benefits – pushing rail fares and tariffs even higher – while little is spent improving road safety.

For rail safety to be managed as part of the wider transport picture, the RI would probably need to return to the transport department (its home until the Tories washed their hands of it after the 1988 Clapham crash). But that wouldn't fit with Darling's strategy of increasing his control over rail without increasing his responsibility.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
THIS IS EXCELLENT! I CAN ORDER MY TRAIN TICKETS ON-LINE
...AND JUST PICK THEM UP AT THE STATION
TICKETS
Grizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SCHOOL'S OUT

EARLIER this year Doncaster's education director Mark Eales sent a stern letter to parents warning them that taking children out of school to go on family holidays had to stop. It was disruptive to schools, he said, and damaging to children's education. At one school last year such unauthorised absences accounted for 430 days.

In Doncaster, as elsewhere, it tends to be middle-class parents who allow their children time off in this way, while disapproving of old-fashioned nicking-down-the-shops truanting by the offspring of the lower classes. Middle-class parents, in fact, such as Martin Winter, elected mayor of Doncaster.

At the mayor's banquet and ball on 28 June — the highlight of the South Yorkshire "season" — Winter apologised to the audience if his speech seemed rambling. He said he was just back from the Glastonbury pop festival, where he had composed his oration on his laptop, sitting cross-legged in the mud, absorbing the smoky, blissed-out ambience. He said he had taken his children aged seven, nine and 13, to Glasters because he believed time spent there was more "educational" than school. The *Eye* has learned that Winter's concern for his children's education extended to taking them out of school so they could attend Euro 2004 in Portugal with him the week before.

Still, as a man who earlier this year awarded himself a 50 percent pay rise, Mayor Winter — who has spurned the *Eye*'s request for a chat — can no doubt afford the £100 fines the government has introduced for the parents of truants!

● **WHILE the London borough of Lambeth's outsourced council tax collectors Crapita are zealous in hounding honest residents through the courts for money they don't owe (*Eye* 1110), they are less dynamic at harvesting tax from those who deliberately avoid payment. In 2003-2004 Lambeth came 354th out of 355 local authorities in England by collecting just 88.7 percent of tax due. The honour of being worst in the country as usual fell to Lambeth's transpontine rival, Hackney, which collected just 79.3 percent of council tax due. (The national average is 96.5 percent.)**

MORAY HEEL

EDDIE ALDRIDGE, erstwhile leader of Moray council in Scotland, is a distinguished man: wealthy Speyside farmer, former deputy lord lieutenant, Independent councillor and holder of the OBE for "services to local government".

He also had a nice sideline in relieving little old ladies of their property, for which he was jailed last month after admitting forging a will purporting to be that of his neighbour, Dolly Coutts.

Aldridge, a long time "friend", had found a 1982 will in Dolly's house while she was in hospital. He copied it and had a new one printed on his council laser printer which bequeathed Dolly's £100,000 estate to himself. The witnesses to the fraudulent will were a neighbour and his council secretary, but the crown accepted their pleas of not guilty.

Aldridge appears to have been too dim, or failed sufficiently to quiz Dolly when she was alive, to realise that the crofter had made out a later will in favour of her niece. Handwriting experts had little trouble detecting that Mrs Coutts's "signature" was forged. Aldridge had also copied the outdated legal wording of the 1982 will.

After Aldridge's imprisonment, Anne Butt, niece of Louisa Innes, who died four years ago, demanded an investigation into events surrounding *her* aunt's perplexingly generous decision to make her home over to Aldridge before she died. Like Dolly, Louisa was a neighbour of Aldridge in Archiestown, a village on the banks of the River Spey, salmon fishing playground of the rich and famous. But a Grampian police spokesman told the *Eye* last week that McKnacker had seen no evidence to justify taking the matter further.

That may not be the last we hear of Aldridge, however. Moray councillors have asked the standards commission for Scotland to investigate planning decisions he was involved with over the past year.

WACKO, JACKO

OXFORDSHIRE county council's director for resources, John Jackson (*Eye* 1108), is an even busier fellow than we realised.

In our report on "book-keeping problems" that left Oxfordshire with an £11m black hole in its accounts, we noted that Mr Jackson had quit as director of finance at North Tyneside council in 2001. Shortly after his departure it was discovered that the council was in deep financial trouble, with undisclosed debts of £6.4m.

Now we learn that he squeezed in another high-powered, if short-lived, job between Wallsend and Oxford. After leaving North Tyneside he was appointed £110,000-a-year chief executive of Nottingham city council. On arrival he was praised as the best thing since sliced bread, but a year later the Labour council suddenly decided "a different style of leadership" was required. So off he went with a year's money in his pocket and an agreement that neither side would talk about the reasons for his departure. Apologies for omitting this important item from Mr Jackson's CV.

SORE LOSERS

THE *Eye* has frequently pointed out that the struggle between those who believe in council housing and the Labour government's desire to see it all privatised is an unequal one.

Back in January, tenants in the London borough of Camden voted overwhelmingly against a proposal to transfer control of council properties to a so-called arms-length management company (Almo) — despite the fact that the council had spent £500,000 on pro-Almo propaganda.

Six months after the vote, the council – led by "new" Labour "dame" Jane Roberts — is evidently still smarting at its defeat. It has issued a summons against Alan Walter, a Camden tenant and prominent member of the Defend Council Housing pressure group, for the heinous (alleged) offence of fixing an anti-Almo poster in a bus shelter "by means of sticky brown tape". If found guilty Walter faces a fine of up to £1,000. Camden is also seeking £460 costs. Don't you just hate a bad loser?

GOOD RIDDANCE

SO FAREWELL Peter Ridsdale, who has stepped down as chairman of Education Leeds, the "arms length" company that has run schools in Leeds for the last three years (*Eyes passim*).

His appointment had seemed a good idea to council chiefs while the man known as "publicity Pete" could apparently do no wrong as chairman of high-flying Leeds United. But things soon went pear-shaped at Elland Road: United headed for relegation, Ridsdale was revealed to have run up debts of more than £70m, and he was on his way. The city's parents and pupils were left wondering in the light of all this why he was still thought good enough to run the city's schools. Now — after his Labour cronies on the council have been booted out in favour of a bizarre Lib Dem / Tory / Green coalition — he seems to have got the message.

● **FAREWELL, too, to Calderdale (Halifax) council's short-lived but snappily titled "Race Equality and Community Cohesion Working Party". As the *Eye* went to press it looked likely to be scrapped following the uproar which ensued after BNP councillor Adrian Marsden was appointed to it — a result which is presumably not at all to the dislike of Marsden and his knuckle-dragging colleagues. In political circles such a procedure is known as "throwing the Nazi out with the bath water".**

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

WHAT'S THAT SUPERMARKET "OWN-BRAND" SALAD CREAM DOING BESMIRCHING ONE OF YOUR ALFRESCO BASHES, GUYS?
SURELY YOU'RE NOT GOING TO POLLUTE THE INSALATA TRICOLORE WITH THAT MUCK?!
ABSOLUTELY NOT!
BUT IT MAKES AN INCREDIBLY EFFECTIVE INSECT REPELLANT!
Cheap Co. SALAD CREAM
20p

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

IT ISN'T only chancellor Gordon Brown who reckons there's a bob or two to be had from selling all that unnecessary land lying around. Supposedly sport-supporting charities are at it too.

In Bristol, for instance, the local YMCA is planning to flog off £2m worth of cricket pitch to a housing developer. The sale of the pitch, which has been used by the YMCA Cricket Club since 1878, will leave one other cricket pitch at the Golden Hill site – but that's not enough for the four adult teams and several junior teams who currently use it.

Money raised by the sale would pay for a new pavilion, floodlighting and other benefits for the remaining space, but cricket enthusiasts say nothing would make up for the loss of the pitch they actually *need* to play the game and give up-and-coming youngsters a chance to improve.

DOWN ON THE FARM

ONE delight of writing this column is the wondrously irate condescension with which readers rush to point out that Muckspreader doesn't know what he is talking about.

So many more letters in this vein does *Private Eye* receive than the editor has space to print that he has asked for this week's column to comment on some – beginning with that which does appear in this week's Letters from Professor James Ironside, head of the National CJD Surveillance Unit.

Prof Ironside's ire was aroused by Muckspreader's claim that "there is still not a shred of proof to connect eating BSE-infected beef with CJD". This, he claims, is "quite incorrect", suggesting that Muckspreader should "check the science".

Alas, it is precisely the science which confirms that Prof Ironside and his colleagues in the "BSE/vCJD industry" have got it wrong. When variant CJD was first linked to eating BSE-infected beef in 1996, forecasts of the likely death toll ran into millions. Prof John Patteson, then head of SEAC, the government body which works alongside Prof Ironside in Edinburgh, agreed that, by 2005, eating infected beef could have been responsible for 500,000 deaths. But even then the epidemiological evidence indicated that, if scientists such as Ironside and Patteson were right, we should have been seeing the graph of vCJD rising much faster than was reflected in the actual figures.

In his letter Ironside ingenuously states that "the numbers of vCJD cases continues to increase, although the rate of increase has declined". What he does not point out is that, according to the latest figures from his own department, the yearly number of vCJD deaths peaked in 2000 at 28. This year, up to April, the figure is just one.

The total number of deaths since the disease was first identified in 1994 is 140 – rather fewer than the 500,000 predicted by Prof Patteson. If there were .any link between beef-eating and vCJD, the figures should now be hurtling upwards, not dwindling towards zero.

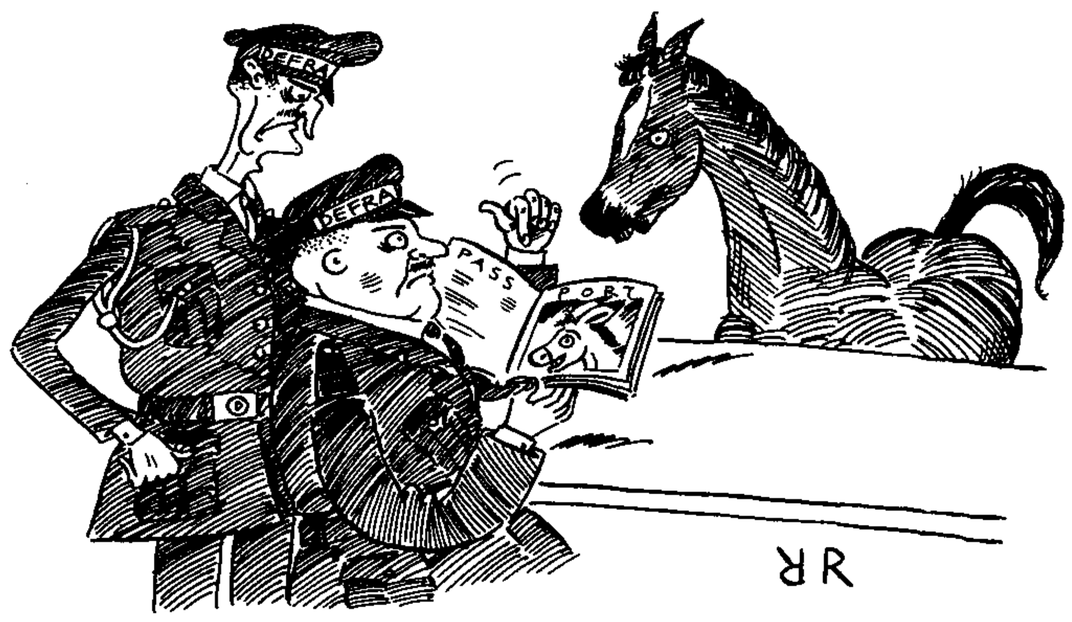
Another topic provoking angry letters was the "horse passport scheme", introduced by the EU to prevent potentially dangerous veterinary drugs given to horses being passed into the human food chain in those countries which eat horseflesh. Fans of compulsory passports for "equines and asinines" included Celia Clarke of the Sports Pony Studbook Society, and it is true that Muckspreader erred in suggesting that not all horses need a "silhouette" certified by a vet.

But if horse-owners are as keen on this new bureaucratic imposition as Ms Clarke and others claimed, is it not odd that, by the official deadline on 30 June, for the 750,000 horses in the country, only 216,000 passports, less than a third, had been applied for?

Then there were those who waxed irate at the suggestion that wiping out hill farmers by withdrawing their subsidies might not be good news for birds, butterflies and flowers. Alas, these letter writers only betrayed their ignorance of what happens when upland fields cropped by cattle and sheep are abandoned, to regress to sterile bracken and scrub. Ecological diversity goes out of the window. Readers who could see nothing wrong in the new "cross-compliance rules", which will now make it a condition of receiving EU subsidies that farmers must pay an extra £1,000 or more a year to demonstrate their compliance with 18 EU directives, obviously have no idea how crazily bureaucratic and unnecessary most of those EU rules are.

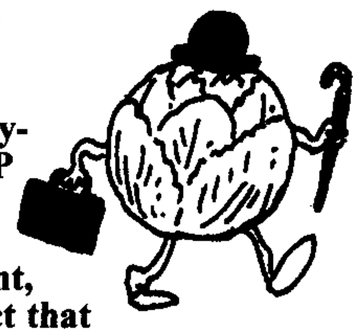
As for those readers who fume at the notion that farmers should be subsidised at all, they must remember that subsidies are a central part of the EU's protectionist system. This may do immense harm to farmers in the Third World, put out of business by the dumping of subsidised EU surpluses on their local markets. It also does intense harm to British farmers, because of our government's willingness to see them receive much lower subsidies than their EU competitors, who can therefore undercut them on price, filling UK supermarkets with cheap French apples, Danish bacon and Spanish tomatoes. But if you object to subsidies, it is not farmers who should be the target of your wrath. It is to our government in Brussels, not Muckspreader, that complaints should be directed.

'Muckspreader'



"Of course it doesn't look like me, it's my passport photo!"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS



WHEN Robert Kilroy-Silk and chums in UKIP announced that they were going to "wreck" the European parliament, they surely didn't expect that the first innocent casualty would be their very own senior British civil servant.

When David Boyd, deputy secretary-general of the new Eurosceptic political grouping, Independence & Democracies, spoke to the *Eye* after the European elections, the Ulsterman said how much he was looking forward to working with the enlarged UKIP delegation. "Imagine them in the bureau, the trouble they could cause: it will be fun!"

Alas, less than a month later Boyd has resigned in disgust over UKIP's alliance with the anti-semetic League of Polish Families. And who can blame him?

Boyd felt obliged to resign because, though the make-up of the pan-European groups has not yet been finalised, he had been obliged to represent the Polish leagues in parliamentary preparation meetings.

Despite attempts to distance themselves from the British National Party and National Front at home, UKIP MEPs seem happy to break bread with unsavoury far-right types when out of sight and collecting their expenses in Brussels.

TORY MEPs have got off to a flying post-election start in Brussels: last week five of their number were nearly expelled from the party.

As *Eye* readers will recall, before the June election Tory candidates were forced to sign up to a single page in their manifesto committing them to align with the pro-federalist European People's Party. Though all members signed the document (not doing so would have barred them from standing), many were unhappy. Matters came to a head after the elections when the EPP met in Budapest and promised to work towards ratification and implementation of the European constitution and support the "European Social" model. Five Tories refused to sign up to this. Two, Chris Heaton-Harris (Tory candidate in the Leicester by-election) and Theresa Villiers (London) were risking their Westminster ambitions, while Martin Callanan (North East), Roger Helmer (East Midlands) and Dan Hannan (South East) had less to lose.

Desperate to avert a crisis, emergency meetings were held with party leaders and the phones rang hot. Finally the rebels received a letter from Michael Howard's office apparently allowing them to stay in the party group yet claim victory too. Thus at home the Tories remain opposed to the European constitution while in Brussels its MEPs are apparently committed to its implementation. Fudge anyone?

HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE "universities" of Preston and Halifax are causing headaches at the department for education and skills (DfES).

The two establishments aren't based in the eponymous UK towns but have campuses in London and Birmingham and are managed by the same company, which is based in Wyoming, US. Halifax and Preston, which provide courses in business administration, hospitality management and IT, *are* licensed by the Wyoming education department as further education institutions. However, the word university is restricted under UK law and only the privy council can award university status in this country.

The DfES has reported both institutions to Companies House and is determined to do away with any misleading impression that they are properly accredited UK universities. But wait. Who's this pictured in the Preston prospectus, handing out diplomas at a graduation ceremony? Step forward shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram.

Ancram, fellow Tory Peter Luff MP and 1999 Miss World Yukta Mookhey all attended the ceremony to give out qualifications to students.

Warballs

● "During the debate, former Tory minister Lord Howe said that abolition of the post [of Lord Chancellor] 'could be almost compared with the events of 11 September'." — **BBC News online.**

● "My big beauty secret is that I love and need lipstick. It makes me feel feminine even in dangerous circumstances – even in the middle of a war." — **Bianca Jagger, *Sunday Times* Style section.**

● "It's going to be great. For three years since the attack on the World Trade Center, all we have had is unrelentingly bad news and people are hungry for some kind of break." — **Westminster councillor Ian Wilder explaining to *West End Extra* why Regent Street, Pall Mall and Trafalgar Square should be turned into a Formula One Grand Prix circuit.**

● "I imagine *Transmission* to be at the crest of the dotcom era, where there's a kind of happy bubble. Even post-9/11, you can walk into a pub on any night in London and see people whooping it up. But there's a fragility to it." — **Hari Kunzru on his new novel, *Publishers' Weekly*.**

THE office of external relations commissioner Chris Patten is feeling the heat in a corruption scandal involving a former British employee of the EU Agency for Reconstruction (EAR), David Williams.

Williams is being investigated over his apparent links with two German companies which won a lucrative contract to rebuild the Serbian power plant, Nikola Tesla A3, near Belgrade. The probe has the cooperation of the EU's anti-fraud unit (Olaf) which sent a file to the public prosecutor in Wuppertal, Germany, who opened the case.

Williams had been suspended by EAR in January 2003 because of irregular contacts specifically with one of the firms, LLS. Yet he was also involved in giving the A3 contract to a consortium of both LLS (Lurgi Lentjes Service) and Siemens. The firms mysteriously secured the contract although their tender (almost 50 million euro) was considerably higher than rival firms Alstom (France) and Innogy (Britain).

NOOKS and CORNERS

WHY Britain treats its dead quite so badly is a complex subject. But it is clear we fear death as we fear old age and would rather not think about it. Thus our cemeteries are neglected in ways seldom found in continental Europe.

Much of the vandalism is committed by local authorities. Tombstones are removed on the grounds that they are unsafe and a danger, regardless of their interest or beauty. Yet cemeteries and churchyards are much more than quiet, contemplative open spaces (though they are valuable as that). They are of great archaeological, genealogical, religious, historical and aesthetic importance too. And, besides, perhaps the dead deserve respect.

All this comes to mind with regard to the old burial ground at Blythburgh Hospital in Suffolk. This institution began as Bulcamp Union Workhouse, opened in 1766. It was a fearsome place and the previous year local people had rioted at the proposal to abandon out-relief for the poor. By the 1820s more than 550 paupers were banged up in this proto-Thatcherite prison which, in 1836, was converted to segregate men from women, husbands from wives, and children.

Like many workhouses, the one in Blythburgh eventually became a hospital which finally closed in 1994. Since then some of its Georgian buildings have been converted into houses. Good. But now Megahart Ltd has permission from Suffolk Coastal district council to convert the rest of the site into more expensive housing and a "leisure complex". This involves building new houses and laying out a car park over the burial ground when some 2,000 workhouse inmates were interred.

The developers think it is enough to put up a memorial plaque to the poor wretches buried there, after the ground is deconsecrated. But it is not. Not only should Blythburgh Hospital burial ground, like any ancient cemetery, be left alone and treated as a sacred historical site, but its occupants deserve better. They had miserable enough lives, after all: why should they be disturbed in death to suit a developer?

So good luck to Mrs Susan Doherty, of Beccles, who has taken up their cause. As she says: "The whole idea is immoral, unacceptable, and a health hazard. The dead cannot speak, but I can..."

MY PICTURE shows an interesting new "art work" at Ely Cathedral. The Lady Chapel at Ely is one of the most poignantly beautiful rooms in England and well illustrates the cruel destructiveness of religious fundamentalism.

The great windows with flowing decorated tracery are no longer filled with stained glass and the ogee-topped stall canopies which line the walls are enriched with sculpture which was systematically smashed at the Reformation.

Those stone figures are damaged beyond repair, so, to celebrate the completion of a restoration of the chapel in the year 2000, the then dean, the Very Rev Michael Higgins, decided to commission something new in frank and fearless contrast to the old.

Cathedral government has changed little since the days of Trollope and deans are powerful men. Dean Higgins, a former lawyer and greatly enamoured of the rich and famous, decided to commission the once-fashionable sculptor David Wynne, best known for bronzes of boys and dolphins and big sexy naked women. The result is the stone figure of Our Lady which now stands against the east window, challengingly out of scale with the

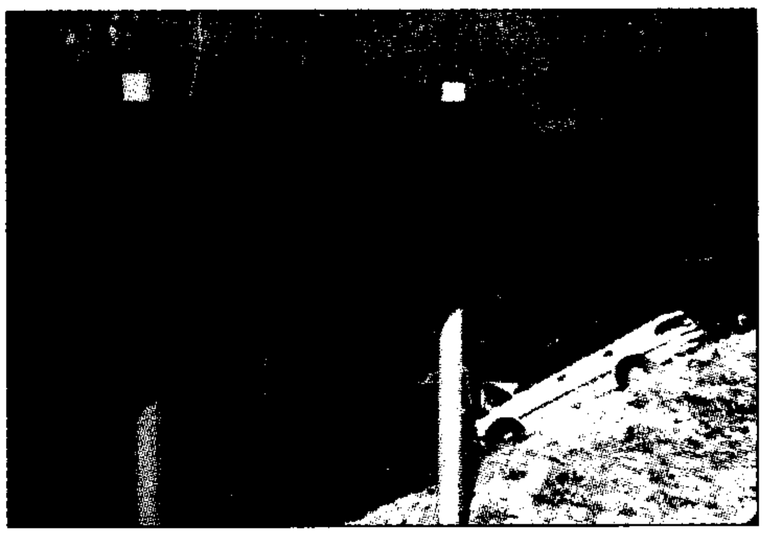
exquisite architecture of the chapel and brightly coloured to relieve the drabness of the boring old stonework.

Christened "Charlie Dimmock" [Who he? Ed.], ***it is of a big girl in a tight blue dress with her arms up in the air as if holding, say, a giant marrow. Her hair is painted bright yellow. The dean managed to inveigle the Prince of Wales into unveiling the statue and it is reported that its exposure was greeted by a shocked silence.***

Now I don't wish to encourage vandalism – certainly not at Ely – but merely wish to suggest on the grounds of taste, propriety and architectural integrity that perhaps this fecund figure might better be placed in, say, the cathedral tearoom – or, better still, lent to a local garden centre.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Ross-on-Wye*



Submitted by Trevor Jones. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

LIFE doesn't move too fast in Suffolk. Last year's Aldeburgh Festival was dominated by talk of the Britten sculpture on the beach. Twelve months on, the hot news at this year's festival was *again* the Britten sculpture on the beach.

Amid the arguments and recriminations, the Britten Estate has kept a determinedly low profile. But the lowest profile of all has been kept by Thomas Ades, the fashionable composer who is theoretically artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival. Aloof, hermetic and unapproachable, Ades has not endeared himself to the Aldeburgh community by his apparent lack of interest in them.

Last year he was hardly seen at his own festival (owing to pressure of work elsewhere). This year he made a token showing but (for the same reason) had handed over his responsibilities to a "guest artistic director". And for next year the festival has appointed someone else as "director of programming" – an appointment that wouldn't seem to leave anything for Ades to do. Except perhaps direct the controversial proposed wheelchair traffic on the beach around the unpopular sculpture.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

"Erm... Tom was saying you're a cellist..."

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Graham Bland

AN ITEM in 'Music and Musicians' in *Private Eye* 1089 (September 2003) suggested that Graham Bland's job as Director of Somerset Music was 'on the line' as the result of disagreement in Somerset about the teaching of classical music to schoolchildren that had led to 44 schools in Somerset leaving the music service and that the Somerset Council was to hold a meeting to call Mr Bland to account.

In fact we now understand that 44 schools had not left the music service, that no meeting to call Mr Bland had been organised and that his job was not on the line. We therefore are pleased to be able to confirm that this is the case and to apologise to him for making these incorrect allegations.

Letters

A meaty issue

Sir,

On reading Down on the Farm (1109) we were astonished to see the remark that "there is still not a shred of proof to connect eating BSE-infected beef with CJD". This statement is quite incorrect.

The link between BSE and its human equivalent is not to all forms of CJD but vCJD (variant CJD). BSE and vCJD are caused by the same transmissible agent, which has different properties to the sporadic CJD and scrapie agents. This link has been confirmed in independent leading laboratories across the world. Data from the National CJD Surveillance Unit indicates that victims of variant CJD were more likely to have consumed meat products which were potentially contaminated with BSE than control cases.

The offical figures from the National CJD Surveillance Unit indicate that the numbers of vCJD cases continues to increase, although the rate of increase has declined recently. This in no way invalidates the link with BSE, as there will be other individuals infected with BSE who will have a longer incubation period than current cases of vCJD, due to differences in the prion protein gene. Muckspreader would do well to check the science before attempting to "dish the dirt"!

PROF JAMES W IRONSIDE,

Director, National CJD Surveillance Unit, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh.

WAYNE A. LEE

Barnstaple, Devon.

● ***See Muckspreader***

Editorial error

Sir,

Further to your article on power cuts ("Kept in the dark", 9 July), can we point out that Ofgem published its report on last year's powercuts in London and the Midlands on 25 June 2004 – by the middle of the year as promised.

While it found that National Grid Transco was not in breach of its licence, Ofgem did not give the company a clean bill of health. We have introduced a new scheme which means that the company will, in future, be penalised automatically in the event of blackouts of the kind seen in London and the Midlands, with costs that could run into millions of pounds.

We should also emphasise that it is not Ofgem which is hoping to raise £5bn by selling off parts of its gas network. It is NGT wanting to undertake the sell-off and is seeking our regulatory approval.

Yours,
SARAH HARRISON,

Director of Communications, Ofgem.

● ***See 'In The Back', 26, 27.***

*"You're right, it did sound like "'till **debt** do us part'"*

A CABE man writes...

Sir,

Without wanting to let the facts get in the way of your wit and indignation, there are a few things worth getting straight.

You wonder "who asked CABE" to comment on the Regent Palace Hotel? We were asked to comment by both the local authority and the applicant. Despite your suggestion of immense power (which is quite flattering), CABE cannot approve or refuse any schemes or impel anyone to submit a project to our design review committee. It's optional, expert, advice for which there is high demand.

And on that last point, "no historians on the staff"? You clearly have no researchers on yours. Quite aside from the presence of English Heritage at relevant committee meetings, we have people such as Sophie Andreae (previously the chair of SAVE), Dr Demetri Porphyrios (one of the most eminent classical architects in Britain), Taryn Nixon (head of the Museum of London archaeological service), and staff with a background as conservation officers.

Finally, the comments on the Architects' Journal only go to show how balanced that magazine's coverage is, but I would say that, wouldn't I?

Yours ever,
PAUL FINCH,

Acting Chair, CABE.

Lookalike

Brown **Shrek**

Sir,

I was struck by the uncanny resemblance between our esteemed chancellor and the 'handsome' Shrek in the film Shrek 2. Surely Mr Brown isn't that much of an ogre?

MATT FENBY TAYLOR,

Via email.

To cap it all

Sir,

Regarding Mr Brown's cull of jobs in the civil service. Can we expect a similar expansion of jobs at the government's favourite company, Crapita? The cost of course appearing elsewhere on the government's balance sheet and statistics.

Yours faithfully,
ALEC WHITEHOUSE,

Cropston, Leics.

O'Boulez's sour note

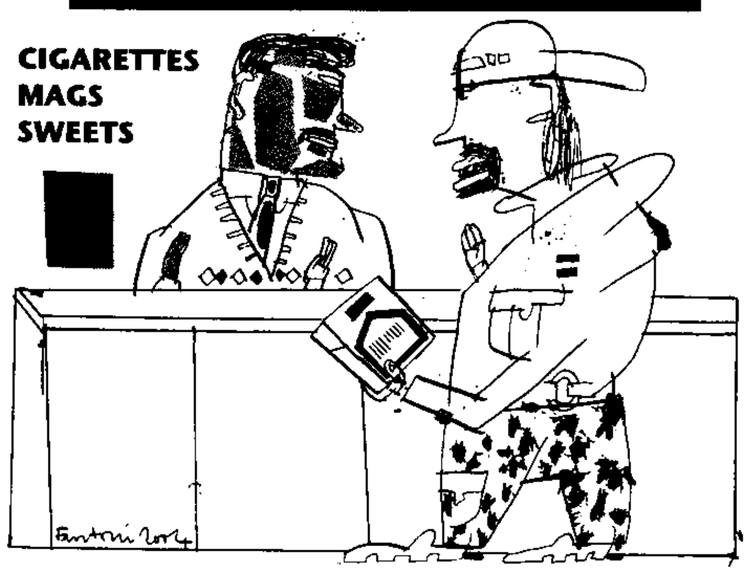
Sir,

The North Ossetian State Orchestra of Vladikavkaz does not deserve the disparaging tone adopted by Lunchtime O'Boulez. The Soviet conductor Veronika Dudarova, renowned domestically in her day, was a graduate, as is V. Gerghiev, rather more familiar to the musical world at large.

ALAN MYERS,

Hitchin, Herts.

Scenes You Seldom See



"It says on the packet that smoking seriously harms you and others around you. No thanks. Not for me"

Blown out of the water

Sir,

The spelling of Alleanza Nazionale is not the only thing you got wrong in Brussels Sprouts (Eye 1110). I am sure that those Tory MEPs will not find their AN counterparts "unsavoury". It is true that AN has its roots in Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), which in turn originated from the Republican Fascism of 1943-45, but since 1994 AN has steadily renounced its original anti-capitalist, pro-welfare state stance (along with the cult of Mussolini's memory) to become, well, best buddies with millionaire PM Silvio Berlusconi and virtually indistinguishable from the capitalist and free enterprise-friendly Conservative party of Great Britain.

Secondly, the suggestion to "[blow] refugee vessels in the Adriatic out of the water" actually came not from an Alleanza Nazionale minister, but from a Lega Nord (the separatist Northern League) local politician.

Yours, etc.
PAOLO A. LIVORATI,

Trevi, Italy.

Not the Dubliners

Sir,

Your reader was wrong to identify the photo of the "Typical Dubliners" in issue 1109 as members of the MI6 "Cairo Gang". In fact these men were a group of Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) detectives who also operated in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War. According to the Irish historian Ulick O'Connor, they were known as the "Igoe Gang". Their job was to come into Dublin from the countryside in order to identify IRA commanders who were in the capital to meet with Michael Collins and the GHQ staff. So in fact these men were Irish but were not Dubliners. I have never seen a photograph of the "Cairo Gang" and I assume they were not in the habit of having their picture taken since they were secret agents. Sorry to nit-pick but I thought I might as well clear this up.

Yours sincerely,
M. LYNCH,

Belfast.

LUVVIES

"Film-making is like the First World War," he says, swilling back the last of his tea, and uncrossing his long legs. "It just grinds you down. All you can do is to focus simply on surviving it."

JOHN CLEESE
The Independent

Submitted by Richard A. Williams

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Acne gazette

Sir,

I saw your piece in Eye 1109 and felt it was inaccurate. Roaccutane is a powerful drug with many side effects, so in the UK it can only be prescribed in a hospital by a specialist dermatologist after blood tests. Your GP cannot prescribe it. But it is the only drug that can cure clinical acne, so there are considerable benefits to balance the side effects. Your article is wrong to say that "one of the most prominent side effects is depression and suicide". It is one of the rarest.

Facts: Over 50,000 people in the UK have been treated with Roaccutane. Adverse psychiatric drug reactions (ADRs) reported for those 50,000 have been 135 (0.27%). 23 of those 135 were suicides, attempts, or thoughts of suicide (0.046%). Although this could be under-reported, it's still a very small figure. (Source: Middlekoop, Journal of Pharmacy Practice, 1999).

The link with depression and suicide is not proven, but certainly deserves further investigation, but needs to be kept in perspective with the large numbers of people whose lives have been improved by the drug, including mine, and suffered minor, tolerable side effects.

There's a reason for prescription medicines being unavailable for self-administration, don't you think? Darwin Awards all round for people who order over the internet in a language they cannot understand.

I have no connection with Roche.

Regards,
DAVID COLLINS,

Acnehelp (www.acnehelp.org.uk).

Doctor evil

Sir,

I read the letter from Dr Stephen Hayes with absolute horror. On behalf of parents who have suffered the loss of a child through suicide, his dismissive attitude is hurtful and shocking. As a GP he may know much about the use and side effects of Roaccutane, but in one sentence has managed to trivialise the indescribable pain and confusion felt by those grieving their child. What a charming display of empathy.

Yours,
WENDY WILTSHIRE,

Via email.

Spitzer bits

Sir,

Before falling too much in love with Eliot Spitzer, New York's "campaigning" attorney-general (Eye 1109, etc), In The Back should be aware that he is also campaigning to be governor of the state in 2006. Attorney-general is a prime launch pad for higher office, vide Rudy Guiliani.

Interestingly, while suing GlaxoSmithKline over Seroxat (Paxil), Spitzer accepted a $5,000 campaign donation from Eli Lilly, manufacturers of Prozac, Seroxat's largest competitor in the anti-depressant market.

DR ROBERT JOHNSTON,

Northampton.

Gloag of respectability

Sir,

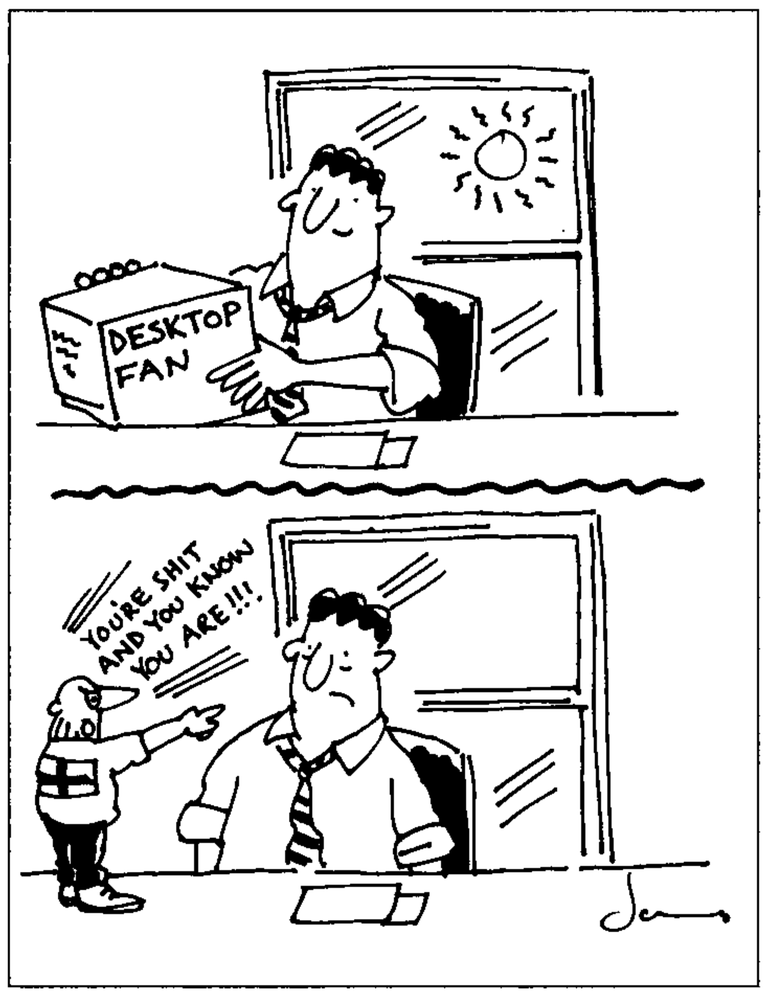
There are many worse than Ann "Stagecoach" Gloag OBE getting these tawdry baubles from a defunct "Empire" (Eye 1109, Gong Show).

Gloag's own commitment as a nurse aboard Mercy Ships and her sustained financial support with thick wedges of her own dosh is very real and beyond cynical reproach.

Would the Eye be happier with purely idle and self-indulgent squillionaires or the likes of Gloag? If ever I fall victim to obscene wealth, I'd like to think I'd do something Gloagy.

STEVEN WATSON,
(as yet unhonoured)

Murray Royal Hospital, Perth.



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

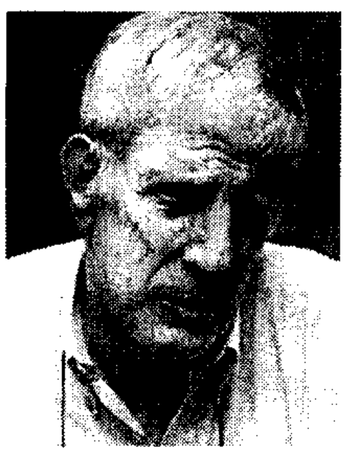
"The Australians and the French have a reciprocal arrangement to let young players get into each other's draws."
VIRGINIA WADE, BBC1
(Stan Peachey)

"And that was Stelios! Or – to give him his full name – Giannakopoulos of Bolton."
JOHN MOTSON, BBC1
(Roddy MacLennan)

"He [David Beckham] is just pretending I'm rubbish at interviewing – which is why he keeps giving me all these one-sybil answers."
VICTORIA BECKHAM, Channel 4
(Ged Parsons)

"Henman a winner as he loses again."
SIMON BARNES, The Times
(Will Hopkins)

Lookalike


Cardinal Newman

Miller

Sir,

Notice any likeness between Cardinal John Henry Newman and Jonathan Miller?

REV. DOMINIC JACOB,

Oxford.

Johnny rotten

Sir,

Just to point out a slight error on your part, where you mentioned Johnny & Denise came out to the announcement "Reunited especially for you". This actually refers to when they recorded and released a cover of Kylie & Jason's song of the same name – and not in reference to their former lives as BB presenters.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,
ADAM TICKNER,

Carlisle.

LUVVIES

My physical and emotional selves were a total mess, but Doctor Theatre is very potent – especially if you're rehearsing with great performers.

SIR PETER HALL
Sunday Times

Submitted by Harry Mount

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Marks & sparks fly

Sir,

Further to the articles about Stuart Rose's dealings, I work for a UK company who trade with Marks & Spencer. Forthcoming changes in all their trading terms amount to a near tripling of their discount payment terms on all existing contracts and all holding stock not yet paid for. This squeezes suppliers' unit profit margins towards unrealistic levels of viability. This is certainly one quick fix M&S can use to fill its coffers and appease shareholders albeit by screwing suppliers in the process.

Yours,
MRS TRELLIS,

North Wales.

Going for growth

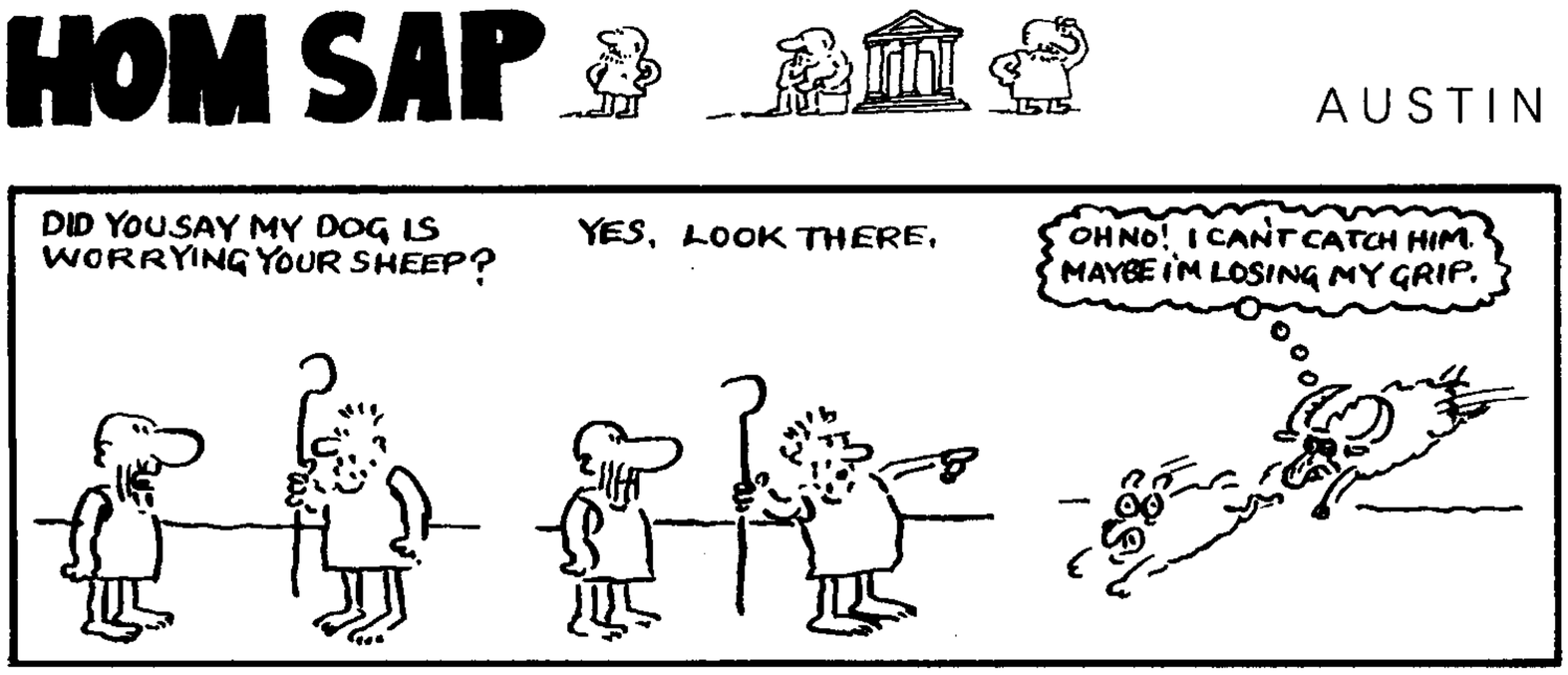
Sir,

I was alarmed to read reports in the press concerning alleged misconduct in the M&S share-dealing situation.

Apparently at the Chelsea Flower Show Mr Rose met Miss Thorne to talk about Mr Green. Was she a plant? Is Bush involved? I think we should be told.

Yours etc,
E.J. HUGHES (no longer 17½),

Isle of Wight.



Letter from **Kiev**

from Our Own Correspondent

YOU might think that things were looking up here in Ukraine.

A few years ago our economy was collapsing and we were a pariah. Recordings apparently made in the office of President Kuchma by one of his guards seemed to show him plotting the murder of journalist Grigory Gongadze, who was found decapitated just outside our capital in 2000, and approving the sale of a radar able to detect US stealth planes to Saddam Hussein.

But now we're good friends with the US and everyone else. We recently won a contract to sell $120m of weapons to the Iraqi army. No journalist has been killed for ages (although the Gongadze case has just raised its ugly head again). And parliament is finally considering changing the constitution to reduce the huge power of the president, which has allowed Kuchma to get away with so much for so long.

There's also money in the budget and our privatisation programme is back on track. In the middle of June Kryvorizhstal — our largest steelworks, biggest exporter and third most profitable company — was sold to a local group against stiff international competition for $800m. This was six times more than any previous privatisation and something of a bonanza for a country where the annual budget this year was just $10bn (and that is before corruption and theft). So there should be plenty left over to pay the salaries of our poor miners, bureaucrats and pensioners.

Our old people have been splashing out on lard, our national dish, after their pensions more than doubled over the last year to an almost giddy $35 dollars a month. And others seem to be doing well too. There are plenty of black Mercedes on the streets, and Hummers are appearing too: our MPs and rich businessmen, who are exempt from traffic rules, like to know they won't be the ones getting hurt if a Lada gets in their way.

One of the main beneficiaries seems to be the noted oligarch (and by an amazing coincidence, presidential son-in-law), Viktor Pinchuk. It was Pinchuk and fellow oligarch Rinat Akhmetov who pocketed the steelworks, despite much more generous bids of up to $1.5bn from international players like US Steel and LNM. Happily such offers were disqualified as the companies didn't fulfill a condition that bidders had to have produced a million tons of coke a year in Ukraine for the last three years. Not even Lakshmi Mittal can compete with our boys.

With elections in the autumn, and having failed to change the constitution to keep themselves in power, Kuchma and his associates are selling state assets to our oligarchs as fast as possible. Pavlohradvuhilya, which produces 13 percent of our coal, is already up for sale, and Pinchuk and Akhmetov are bidding. The state iron-ore mining company and the telephone company will probably be sold soon.

It would of course be outrageous to suggest that our commitment to market-based reforms like privatisation is in any way linked to the desperate need for funds to boost pensions and public sector pay, or for election "expenses" by our president and his friends, who will probably end up in exile in Moscow if they lose.

And it would be equally silly to pretend that such sales also guarantee the support of Pinchuk's TV stations and the benefit of his and Akhmetov's connections — on the grounds that a different government would certainly want to take Pinchuk and Akhmetov's loot back for their own benefit. Not at all, then, like the notorious loans-for-shares scheme which got Yeltsin re-elected in 1996 and made the likes of Abramovich and Bereskovsky hugely wealthy.

In Ukraine we can get away with all this because we've earned US gratitude by sacrificing a few of our miserable soldiers to bring democracy (to which our leaders are so devoted) to Iraq. It may cost hundreds of millions of dollars to bribe our oligarchs. But Washington comes cheap.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "We'd bring the three to trial if we knew what to charge them with," police spokesman Assuman Mugenyi told reporters in Kampala, "but they don't seem to have broken any laws. It's against the law to commit murder, of course, but all the bodies were already dead when they found them. And strange as it may seem, there is no law against cannibalism in Uganda. If you find human flesh in this country, you are free to eat it."

Mugenyi was referring to three people (Mr James Kityo, Mr Rogers Kitumba, and Ms Harriet Nanboga) who had earlier been arrested in Mitanya, and held without charge in Mubende prison. "Cannibalism may be repugnant to wider society, but that

does not mean it is against any specific law. These three suspects freely admit to having eaten more than a dozen people, but say that they only ate corpses they'd retrieved from the Mitanya graveyard. We've no reason to disbelieve them, so there's no question of pressing charges there. However, there is a law against exhuming bodies without a court order, so we may be able to charge them with trespassing on burial grounds. At the moment, we're keeping them in solitary confinement in Mubende, because even the murderers there are frightened of being locked up in the same cell as a cannibal.

"Why do they do it? They say they just like the taste. But for now, their diet is restricted to maize and beans." *(The Monitor [Uganda], 5/5/04. Spotter: Trevor Dudley)*

● *"We're not making fun of the Buddha, we're just helping young people to become more intimate with him," a spokesman for the Yamatokoriyama Sweet Company told a court in Nara, Japan. "Tourism in this area has been in a major slump for years, so we needed a name that would have an impact on visitors. And calling these sweets 'Snot from the Nose of the Great Buddha' has certainly attracted attention and boosted sales."*

But Buddhist priests at the famous Todaiji Temple in the ancient capital of Nara argued that the company should not be allowed to register such a blasphemous name as a trademark. "They make Nara look bad," Kokei Kitagawara told the court, "and the name is offensive to believers. Just because something sells, that doesn't mean it should be sold regardless. The company should follow its conscience and stop selling the sweets."

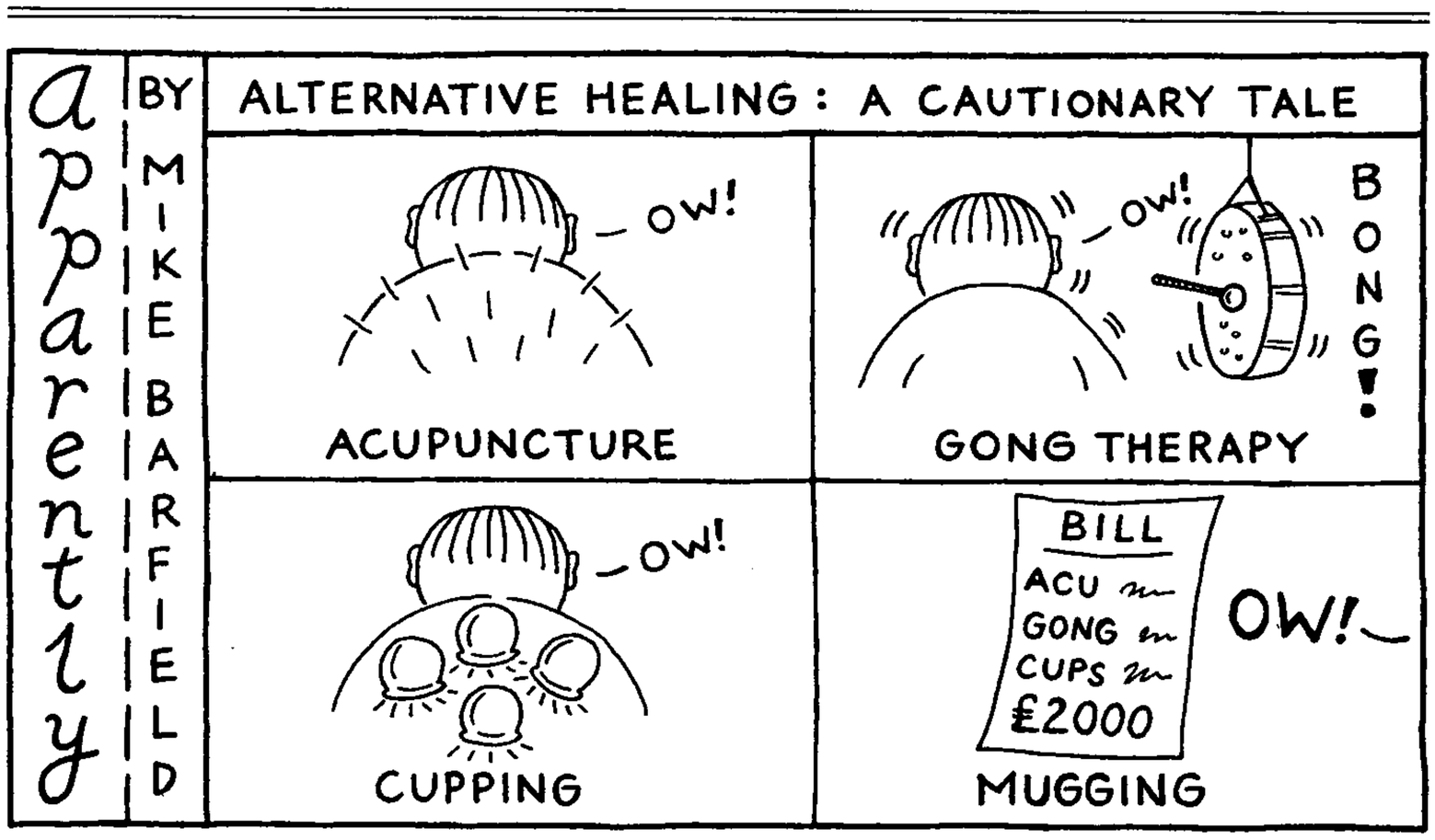
The court ruled that the company could not register 'Snot from the Nose of the Great Buddha' as a trademark, but that the sweets (little balls of black sugar) could still be sold under that name to tourists outside the temple, together with another popular Nara sweet, known as 'Deer Shit'. (Mainichi Daily News, 14/5/04. Spotter: Robert Harland)

– ● –

● "I thought my husband was joking when he first mentioned the idea," Elizabeth Mullen told reporters at the Mullingar Clay Pigeon Shooting Championships, "and didn't give it any further thought. But Tony kept telling his best friend Willy that he was really serious, and when he was on his death bed, he made us both promise to abide by his wishes. So here we are for the competition, with Tony's old shotgun and fifty cartridges, about to dispose of his ashes in the way he wanted."

Willy Hughes then explained why Tony Mullen had wanted to have his ashes fired across the Irish countryside during a shooting championship. "He was passionate about clay pigeon shooting all through his life, and once even represented Ireland in the World Cup. When he realised he was dying, he became obsessed with the idea of being fired out of his own shotgun during a competition, and I agreed to carry out his final wish. So after the cremation, I took the lead shot out of fifty cartridges, filled them with his ashes, and now we'll fire them during the clay pigeon championship here in Mullingar. I'm not expecting to win, because Tony's ashes probably aren't as dense or as accurate as lead, but he wanted to go out with a bang, and he'll certainly do that."

Willy Hughes and Tony Mullen finished fourth. *(The Irish Times, 27/4/04. Spotter: Jonathan Williams)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

The Paper that Supports our Vicar

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

I wonder if you can guess, what I've been thinking about this week?

I've been mulling over my favourite book!

No, not Harry Potter, Rashid! Nor even the Koran!

It's from a book that not many people read nowadays, but which has got a lot of very interesting and relevant – and yes, modern things to say, even though it was written hundreds of years ago.

I'm talking, of course, about the Bible, which comes from the Greek Biblios, which means 'bestseller'!

Anyway, the text in question runs "We're left with three important concepts: good faith, hope and charity. And the most important of these is good faith". *(New Labour Bible, St Paul's Letter to the Joint Intelligence Committee.)*

You see, what I'm getting round to is the fact that, if you look hard enough, you can always find something in the Bible that is precisely relevant to your own situation!

And that phrase "good faith" is exactly what Mr Butler has now decided was the key to why I led the parish in joining the Rev Dubya's great crusade against the Evil One.

Look, Mr Butler had some pretty tough things to say about my sermons on the crusade!

And I respect him for that! He even says that I might have made some mistakes (although, as it happens, he ends up by agreeing that I didn't!).

Mr Butler has served St Albion's loyally ever since he left school in 1940 – he's that grey-haired man you see changing the altar cloths on Saturday mornings – and has been tireless in his support for many previous incumbents, including the Rev Major and Deaconess Thatcher. So he's hardly the man to pull his punches when it comes to criticising the way we do things, is he?

That's why I don't mind admitting that I was a bit nervous when Mr Butler brought his report around to the vicarage and asked me if it was alright!

But I needn't have worried. Mr Butler has produced a marvellous piece of work – fair, balanced and thoughtful.

I could not have written it better myself!

And above all it contained that wonderful phrase, echoing the text I quoted earlier, "the vicar acted at all times and in every respect in good faith".

I can't think of a finer tribute to your vicar! In fact I wouldn't mind having those words written on my gravestone – when the time comes, of course, which won't be for a long time, because I'm very healthy, as you all saw when I was photographed in the St Albion's Fun Run, to raise money for Mr Prescott's exciting plan to build affordable houses on the school playing fields!

In fact, now I mention it, there is still one plain window in the church, the one above the altar, which really could benefit from having a proper stained glass picture in it.

I have asked our local artist Mr de la Nougerede to rough out a design, round that text which I keep mentioning, and which could serve to inspire generations of future St Albion worshippers!

Yours in good faith

Tony

PS. If I have just one tiny little bone to pick with Mr Butler's otherwise faultless report, it is his suggestion that I make all my decisions sitting on the sofa at the vicarage with Mr Campbell and Mr Mandelson, instead of having formal discussions round a table with all the members of the PCC.

Well, of course, I wish we still had the luxury of doing it that way, but times have changed, the world has moved on!

Just think how long all that sort of thing used to take, listening to Mr Cook or Mrs Short holding forth at length and raising points of order!

How can you get anything done that way, in the age of the mobile telephone and the internet?

Honestly, the church could be burning down and Mr Brown could still be sitting there at the end of the table with a grumpy expression, asking if I knew what I was doing!

No, Mr Butler, it's a nice idea, but the sofa is the way forward! As we say nowadays, the sofa is the new church hall!

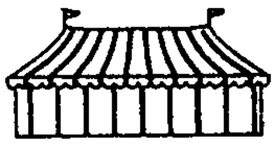
PPS I forgot to mention that I have composed a new chorus, which will be given it's "premier" at our evening service on Sunday.

"Good faith, good faith,
He acted in good faith.
Good faith, good faith,
It's what the Good Book saith."

PARISH ACCOUNTS

We are obviously very grateful to our Treasurer Mr Brown for all the time he has put in on his spending plans for the next three years. Sadly, there is not room in this issue (or any subsequent ones) to publish his accounts in detail (or indeed at all!). I am sure it is all very interesting, and no doubt Gordon has done a thorough job, as always, but really there are more important things for us all to worry about than whether Gordon has got his figures right! If anyone's really bothered, the details are now available on the church website at www.boringstuff.stalbs.co.uk

Millennium Tent Update



■ There is some very good news about the Millennium Tent, which as parishioners may recall, has not found a new use since our celebrations in 2000 (at a cost unfortunately, of £8 billion to parish funds).

We have now had an offer from a very respectable South African company, run by Mr Hendrik van der Kroek, who want to resurrect the tent as an international gaming centre, thus adding immeasurably to the cultural life of the parish. Mr Van der Kroek, who has wide experiences of leisure promotions in Bonkinansawana, plans to rechristen our facility as "Sin City".

Mr Blunkett of the Neighbourhood Watch

From now on I will be on the lookout for anyone stirring up religious hatred. for example if someone were to say "Oi! The vicar is a load of rubbish", he would be arrested at once and then imprisoned for a long period for offending the faith of a large number of devout believers including myself. DB.

HOW TO SURVIVE A TERROR ATTACK

THE Government's Ten Point Plan to make sure YOU escape the Imminent Holocaust
by Hazel Nuts, MP.

❶ Hide under the kitchen table with your family.
❷ Keep all pets in.
❸ Wear lead-lined trousers or a hat made from asbestos.
❹ Stock up on the following items: baked beans, potato crisps (flavour optional), frozen pizzas and Sunny Delight (fun-pack size).
❺ Don't live in the following areas: Central London, Sizewell B, Baghdad.
❻ Remember that terrorists are still out there trying to kill you.
❼ Which proves that the government were right to mount a pre-emptive invasion of Iraq.
❽ So vote Labour
❾ Er...
❿ That's it.

M&S GIFT TO CHARLES

"Sire, the Gifte Shoppe has fallen!"

Movie choice

THUNDERBLAIR Is Go!

Remake of the classic sixties puppet TV show where International Rescue protects the world from disaster. The difference this time is you can't see the strings. Will Tony from Thunderblair 10 (with assistance from Gordon in No 11, of course) defeat the powers of evil by taking orders from the sinister No Brains?
NO.

Cast in full

TONY BLAIR ..... Tony Booth
LADY PENELOPE ..... Cherie Booth
PARKER ..... John Prescott
MAN PULLING STRINGS ..... George Bush

PICK OF THE PROMS

Beethoven's 'Infidelio'

Conducted by **Simon Rattle**
(behind his wife's back)

THE STORY, set in Germany, tells of a beautiful young mezzosoprano who casts her magic spell over the ageing ruler of the Berlin Philharmonic, Sir Simon Love-Rattle. The stricken maestro deserts his wife and runs away with Kozena Fan Frooty, making an aria of himself by singing "Che Gelida Manina" – "My huge bank balance is frozen by my wife".

That Soames/Green Chinese Menu In Full

Dim Soames

– ✻ –

Hot and Sour Dumpling

– ✻ –

Green Tease (served with storm in cup)

TV Highlights

Call My Bluff (BBC1) 1.00pm

That Episode In Full

(Sound of "ping" as word appears on screen)

Fiona Bruce: And the next word is 'Liddle'. Rod, what's a 'Liddle'?

Liddle: Well, a 'Liddle' is a noun meaning the sort of bloke who finally agrees to get married to the mother of his children but then starts carrying on with some totty half his age who he's met at his office. It is a term of abuse really. You might say, "Look at him, what a complete Liddle, I don't want to read about him in the Daily Mail any more".

Fiona: Alan?

Alan Coren: No. No. Rod is bluffing. He's telling you a pack of lies.

Liddle: Hang on, you sound like my wife!

(Daytime audience laughs uproariously)

Fiona: Well, what do you say to that, Rod?

Liddle: Can I have your phone number?

Fiona: Thank you, Rod. Next week's edition of "Call Me In The Buff" comes to you live from the divorce courts.

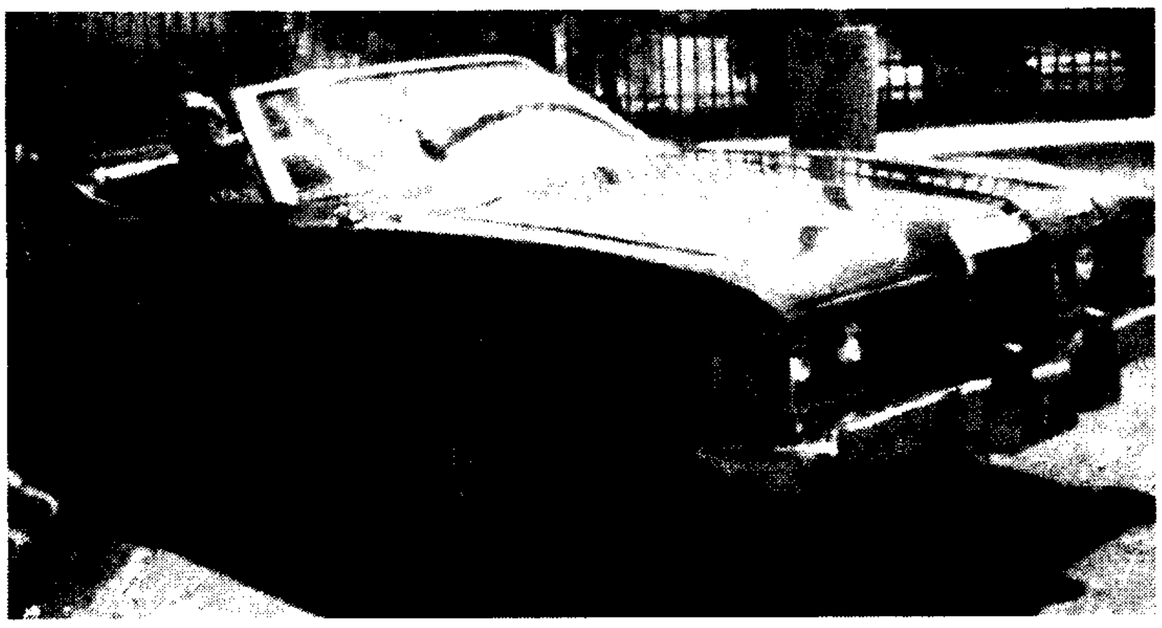
© BBC Two-timing.

Imagine

(BBC1) 9.00pm

The Art of Claiming Expenses

ALAN YENTOB looks at one of the great expenses artists, Alano de Botney, whose skill and creativity in this field amazed his contemporaries and baffled critics from *(cont. Channel 94)*

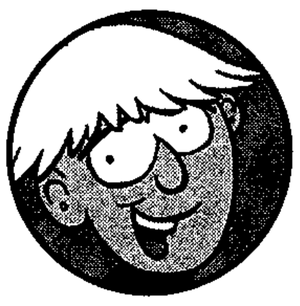


Yentob recreates a typical driving scene from Botney's work.

HOWARD GOES ON 'THIS MORNING'

IN THIS WEEK'S BEANO

(Incorporating the Spectator)

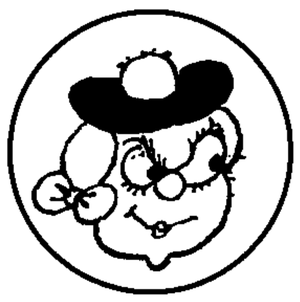


Boris the Menace

"CRIPES! HOW ONE OF OUR WRITERS GOT CAUGHT WITH HIS TROUSERS DOWN – AND IT WASN'T ME!"

Rod the Sod

"OOH-ER! LOOK AT THE SIZE OF MY COLUMN, READERS!"



Mini the Skirt

"OLD AND CLAPPED OUT – BUT I STILL LOVE THE SPECTATOR" (SURELY 'MY ROD'? ED.)

Mrs Liddle

"WHY IS IT CALLED 'THE SPECTATOR' WHEN THEY'RE ALL AT IT?"

IT'S ALL IN THE SPILL THE BEANO!

CIVIL SERVANTS
DARLING! I'M HOME FOR GOOD!
VODKA
I'M SORRY, BUT WE HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH GREY SUITS, SIR
OXFAM
I'M SO WORRIED DOCTOR! HE'S DRINKING HIMSELF TO DEATH!
I'M AFRAID HE MISSES HIS OLD JOB MOST DREADFULLY
WHERE DO YOU WANT ME TO PUT YOUR PENSION GUV?
INDEX LINKED
THAT'S NOT VERY CIVIL OF YOU!
P45
DUN COMMUTING

Report Into The Absence Of Intelligence On Weapons of Mass Destruction

by **Lord Butler of Whitewash**

"The main function of intelligence in a post-war period is to think up ways of getting the Prime Minister off the hook"

Claus von Bulowitz

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The remit of my inquiry was to review all the evidence which might have suggested that Mr Blair had done something wrong, and then to ignore it.

1.2 In the course of my inquiry, it was necessary for me to interview a number of distinctly shifty gentlemen whose names cannot be revealed for security reasons.

1.3 Although it was impossible to believe a word they said, I nevertheless decided to give them the benefit of the doubt and to conclude that they were all acting in good faith.

THE EVIDENCE

2.1 Reliable intelligence sources revealed that Mr Saddam Hussein was attempting to buy 240,000 tonnes of weapons grade "yellow cake" from the Republic of Rumbabwe (formerly British Rumbabaland).

2.2 Forged letters relating to this transaction were brought to my attention, but on mature reflection I concluded that they had been forged in good faith and were accepted as such by the intelligence community, to whom no blame should be attached.

2.3 An aerial photograph showing a 'mobile laundry', capable of completing an entire 'wash cycle' in 45 minutes, was mistakenly believed to show a nuclear weapons delivery system, armed with biological and chemical detergents.

2.4 The blurred nature of this photograph made it entirely understandable that this installation was mis-identified in good faith and no blame should be attached to any individual intelligence officer.

2.5 It was reliably reported to London that there were "unquestioned and very close links" between the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad and Mr Osama Bin Laden, head of the Al Qaeda terrorist network.

2.6 These reports were confirmed by a photograph showing two men with beards talking to each at Prague railway station in what appeared to be a "highly conspiratorial manner".

2.7 I find it in no way unreasonable that this evidence was interpreted by the intelligence services as conclusive proof that we should invade Iraq immediately.

PROCEDURAL ISSUES

3.1 I find it highly regrettable that insufficient memo pads were provided at certain crucial meetings in 10, Downing Street. Such deficiencies would never have happened in my day, when it was considered a top priority that all stationery requirements were supplied in full.

3.2 In my day the following perquisites were regarded as obligatory at all meetings:

a) **A sharpened HB pencil at every place round the table.**

b) **A pencil sharpener for every four civil servants present at the meeting.**

c) **A Grade One quality India-rubber eraser for rubbing out possibly prejudicial material and inserting the words 'Nothing happened and no one is to blame'.**

THE ROLE OF THE JIC

4.1 It has been suggested that it would be grossly improper to appoint Sir John Scarlett to the position of Head of the Secret Intelligence Service, on the grounds of his perceived failure to identify the distinction between a washing machine and a weapon of mass destruction *(see above)*.

4.2 I have decided on reflection that no blame can be attached to Sir John in this regard, since he was clearly under intense pressure to do what he believed the Prime Minister in good faith had asked him to do.

4.3 No blame, therefore, can be attached to the Prime Minister for his foreword to the JIC Dossier, in which he claimed, in good faith, that Britain was about to be attacked by a nuclear mobile laundry (NML) and that we were all going to die.

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 I find that all concerned in the events which are the subject of this inquiry acted at all times in good faith, even when they did not.

5.2 No blame therefore should properly be attached to any individual, including myself, for producing this shameless whitewash of my old friend and former employer, the Prime Minister.

5.3 Er... that's it.

LORD BUTTERUP

ANNEX A
Members of the Committee

The Rt Hon the Lord Butthead of Beavis KP, KFC
The Rt Hon Michael Condom MP
Field-Marshal Lord Whinge of Singe VD, HGV, TCP, NBG
Mrs Anne Token-Woman MP

ANNEX B

A comparison of the original intelligence reports with the 'Dossier' published by the Government.

What the original MI6 version said	How this passage appeared in the Number 10 Dossier
September 3, 2002	*September 4, 2004*
As yet there does not seem to be any sign of these WMD. But we have one source, Z, who claims that he met this chap in a cafe in Amman who swore that his brother had seen this great big metal tube marked "Weapon of Mass Destruction – Top Secret". Quite honestly, I think we should be a bit cautious about this report, as most of our chaps think that Z is off his trolley.	We now have incontrovertible evidence from a highly-placed and completely reliable source that millions of nuclear missiles containing poison gas and anthrax are fully primed and targeted directly at London, which could be completely wiped out in 45 seconds.

I conclude, from a strict forensic comparison of these two passages, that although significant textual changes had taken place, these were made in good faith and not with any intention to mislead.

THAT BUTLER REPORT

Timetable of Events

July 10 Downing Street issues leaks saying that Butler Report will be "a bombshell" and that the government will be "rocked to its foundations" by Butler's "damning criticisms".

July 12 Gullible hacks print stories repeating this at huge length.

July 14 The Report appears and is a damp squib.

July 15 Disappointed hacks say it's not as bad as they thought it would be.

July 16 Government is off the hook.

That Honorary Degree Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS PIERO LUIGI COLLINA, REFERENDUM PEDIBALLI INTERNATIONALIS FAMOSUM PER CAPITO BALDICO ET OCULI SWIVELLENSIS, CELEBRATISSIMUM PER SUPERBUS CONTROLLUS LUDI DURANTE TOTALITER XC MINUTIAE (PLUS TEMPUS EXTRA ET PENALTII SI SUNT NECESSARIUS). APPELATUS 'HOMO IN NEGRO', DISPENSOR CARTORUM RUBICORUM ET JAUNUSQUE, SED SEMPER ADMIRATUS PER ACTIONES 'FIRMUS SED FAIRUS' (CONTRARITER REFERENDUM HELVETICUS GITTUS CUM BARBO RIDICULO IN BRITANNICUS VERSUS PORTUGALLUS SCANDALO MAGNATO).

© The Universiry of Hull (formerly Humberside College of Higher Education)

My eBay

expres-big-willy-c (69)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-2 of 2 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **'Ee-Zee-Snooz' Foldaway Camp Bed (single) – assembles in minutes – ideal for den, lounge, spare room**	US $59.99	US $10.00	1
☐ **BLOWIN' COOL! – Saxophone Tuition CD – Revolutionary 'Non-Inhale' Method**	US $9.99	US $4.99	1

Items I'm Selling (1-4 of 4 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **WOW! X-Ray Spex – see thru clothes, walls, etc – fair cond., one lens cracked**	US $24.99	US $4.99	0
☐ **'1001 Hot Chat-Up Lines' ppbk., good cond.**	US $49.99	US $3.50	0
☐ **'Bathing-Suit Beauty' novelty naughty ballpoint pen – all is revealed! – needs refill**	US $4.99	US $1.50	1
☐ **Large humidor, and contents – genuine reason for sale – 'giving up'**	US $250.00	US $25.00	0

"I had no idea donor cards could be so comprehensive"

Nursery Times

Friday, 23 July, 2004

ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION HITS NURSERYLAND HARD

STORIES IN BRIEF

OLD WOMAN sentenced to one year in prison for swallowing fly. She asks for spider, bird, cat, dog, and horse offences to be taken into consideration.

MOTHER Hubbard arrested for dog abuse. "Cupboard was bare." says shocked policeman.

ROYAL CHEF charged with baking pie containing four and twenty live blackbirds. "What sort of dish is this to set before the King?" asks outraged RSPCA officer.

Daily Mail

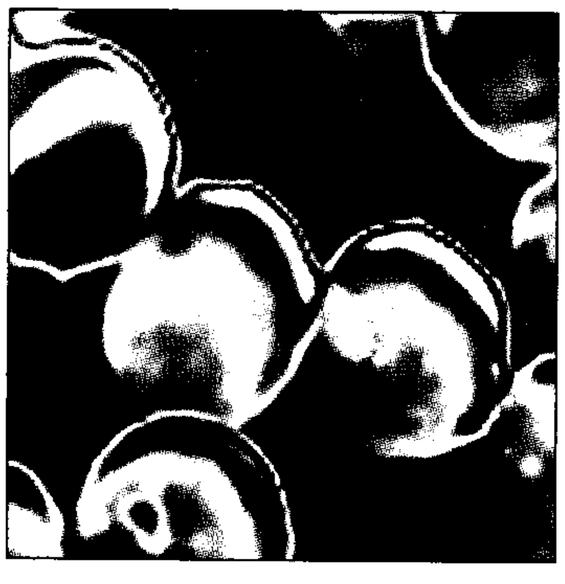
FRIDAY, JULY 23, 2004

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

What did Liz say to Hugh about Jemima?
We don't know.
Page 2-94 *PLUS* Blurred pics

SUPERBUG TERROR – NOW IT GETS EVEN WORSE

By Our **Entire Staff**



AS millions of patients in NHS hospitals are threatened with death from the new killer bug MRSA, medical experts were last night warning of a horrific knock-on effect of the deadly virus – a possible collapse in house prices. There is now a distinct likelihood that thanks to the debilitating MRSA superbug, by this time next year, most homes in Britain could be worth no more than they are today.

"It is a terrifying prospect," said one young couple, Terry and Trish Madeup from Boguston, West Midlands.

"We have invested everything to get our foot on the property ladder, and unless prices keep going through the roof, we will face ruin."

INSIDE

'Why I Say Hats Off To Food – Whatever The Killjoys Tell Us'
by Max Hastings

" 'Eating is bad for you,' claim the anti-food brigade. But I'm damned if I'm going to stop eating, just because nanny state thinks we should live on nothing but air "

LONDON GRAND PRIX 'NOT VIABLE' Say Critics

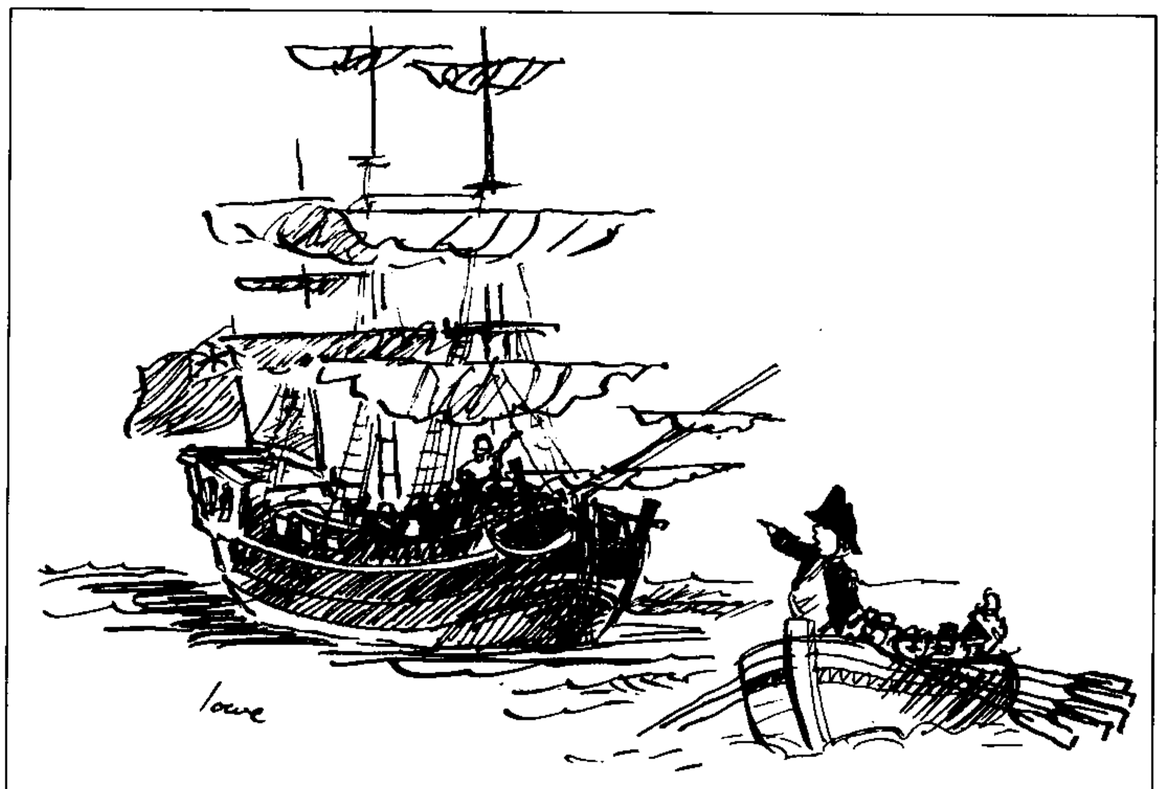
by Our Motor Racing Staff **Christopher Silverstone**

PLANS for the proposed London Grand Prix have run into fierce opposition due to complaints about the noise.

Said a spokesman for the residents group, "The noise would be unbearable. There is that awful whining drone when Ken Livingstone gets into gear. They had a trial run and we had to wear earplugs."

Said Ferrari's Michael Schumacher, "It's not much of a spectacle really, is it? Watching some man going round in circles and then winning every time. It's just boring in the end."

Said Mayor Ken Livingstone, "London is the perfect venue for top level motor-racing and zzzzzzzzz *(cont. p. 94)*



"This won't look good on your CV, Mr Christian"

"Bloody 4 x 4s!"

SEXISM IN CITY SHOCK

by **Sue Pinstripe**

A HIGH-FLYING female executive working for a major City bank today described her three years of hell working in a "flagrantly non-sexist" office.

"Not once in the three years did my boss put a nude calendar up on the wall, pass comment on how fantastic my breasts were, neither did any of my male colleagues send me pornographic e-mails," said the sobbing account executive. "So, instead of receiving a multi-million pound payout at an industrial tribunal like every other high-powered woman working in the City, I have to carry on coming into work on the Tube every morning." She continued, "I am going to sue for loss of earnings and *(cont. p. 94)*

Cairo Times

Friday, July 23, 2004

OUTRAGE OVER THAT LONDON MEETING

by Our British Staff LUNCHTIME NO-BOOZE

THE ENTIRE world of Islam was rocked to its foundations yesterday by the shock meeting in London between one of Egypt's most revered clerics, and the fundamentalist left-wing lunatic Red Ken.

The Mullah was seen openly to embrace the world's most notorious homophile and pigeon-abuser in a scene which will sicken every decent Muslim the world over.

Statesman and Pariah *(right)*

Livingstone Him To Death

The fanatical British extremist leader has in the past expressed unashamed support for the terrorist group Sinn Fein, and also waged a relentless 'holy war' against London's five-million strong motoring community.

Worst of all, the Red Ken has been accused of violent physical abuse towards a practising journalist by pushing him off a wall when under the influence of alcohol, while escorting an unmarried mother at an "immoral and decadent" party.

Doing The Islambeth Walk

But last night the respected Mullah Al Qa'eda hit back at his critics by claiming that they had grossly maligned Red Ken in painting him as "some sort of mad extremist".

"On the contrary," said the Mullah, "Red Ken is a moderate voice who is part of the mainstream, and is just the sort of man we have to learn to deal with.

"He is now closely allied to the Blair regime, he is fiercely opposed to trade unions and his pigeon-killing days are long since behind him."

On Other Pages

■ Your Camel Trains Tonight **24**

■ Pyramid-Selling Scandal Exposed **6**

■ Murder On The Nile – Man Held **10**

CRIMES.

I am very sorry that there has not been any for the last few months but this is due to reorganisation within the police stations.

Willow Watch, Willow Estate, Enfield

Officers tried to calm the confrontation and arrested a man found in possession of a knife and a woman.

Brighton Argos

Those New C of E Prayers In Full

By Our Ecclesiastical Staff
LUNCHTIME O'PEWS

IN A new bid to bring the Church of England into line with modern thinking, on such issues as the environment, smacking, child abuse and cruelty to slugs, the Synod has proposed the following new prayers to be added to the Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book.

Prayer At Harvest Time

✝*Lord, forgive us for all this food we've got, which in a real sense we've stolen from the less privileged people in the world and which was only grown by raping the planet in the first place. It really is sickening what we are doing, and frankly, it can't be right, can it?*

Prayer For Those In Peril On The Sea

✝*Lord, save us from the really appalling crime of hating people just because they are different from us in terms of colour, race, ethnic background, gender orientation, sexual preference or whatever. Ok?*

(That's enough new prayers. God)

News In Brief

MRSA UPDATE

THE Health Minister John Reid has insisted that the Government's long-term strategy to minimise the number of patients exposed to life-threatening MRSA superbugs in NHS hospitals is working.

"One thing's for sure – an elderly patient sitting at home receiving a letter telling them that their operation has been cancelled for the third time in 18 months is never going to catch a hospital super-bug," said a jubilant John *(cont. p. 94)*

SPENDING REVIEW LATEST

GORDON BROWN has rejected Opposition suggestions that only low-ranking Government employees will lose their jobs in the massive redundancies he announced this week.

"These measures will also target highly-paid figures on the State payroll who will be given an ultimatum to take early retirement or be sacked, starting with Tony Blair in Number 10," said a jubilant Chancellor *(cont. p. 94)*

CIVIL SERVICE REACTION

SENIOR Civil Servants have warned the Chancellor that his plans to slash 100,000 jobs in the public sector could cause chaos.

"We'll have to take on tens of thousands of extra staff, simply to deal with the vast volume of paperwork this unprecedented round of redundancies will generate," said a clearly worried Permanent Secretary *(cont. p. 94)*

OBE TO BE REPLACED

THE old-fashioned Order of the British Empire has been deemed "inappropriate" for today's honours system and "unsuitable" for Britain's sporting heroes.

From now on, the likes of David Beckham and Tim Henman will receive the more authentic award of the OBQF, the Order of the British Quarter Final and *(cont. p. 94)*

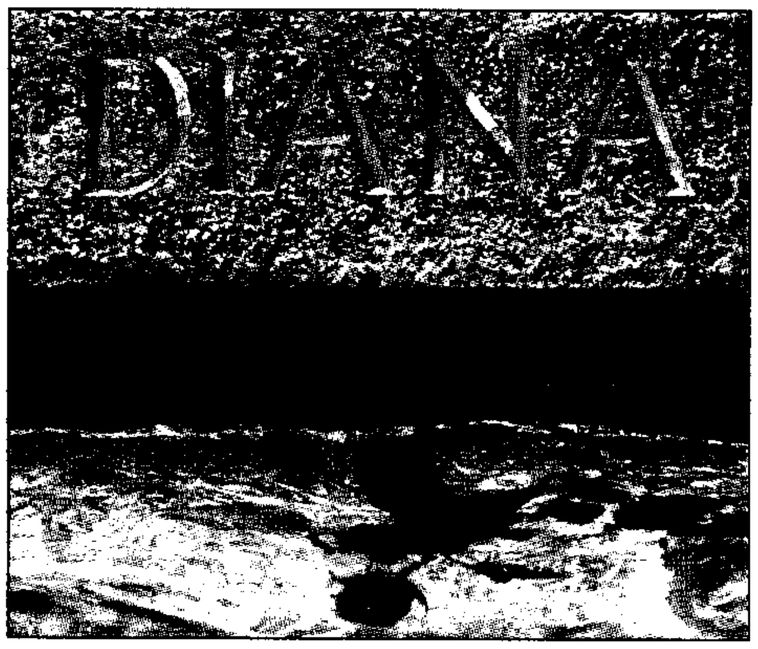
LOST at Field Row outside the vets in Mildenhall, female tabby cat with blue jeans, reward.

Eastern Daily Press

the PREMIERSH*TS

WELL OBVIOUSLY THE RAY PARLOUR DIVORCE CASE HAS AFFECTED THE PREMIERSHIP PLAYERS...
PUNDIT
AND I THINK THAT WILL BE PLAINLY EVIDENT IN THE PERFORMANCES NEXT SEASON...
DON'T TACKLE HIM, LET THE POOR BASTARD THROUGH!
SOB
JUST SHOOT RAY
SOB
PARLO
THE BITCH!

DIARY



THE DIANA MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN
THE EXPERTS HAVE THEIR SAY

HM the Queen: It is hard to believe that it is now seven years since we heard of Diana's death.

Time passes, so the old saying goes, when you're having fun. We as a nation have at last come to terms with our tragic loss. We have learnt, I trust, to let bygones be bygones. Diana is etched on all our memories.

But for many years, she was hard to avoid.

Time is, I think, a great healer.

The essence of Diana is perfectly caught by this leaky stream. It twists and turns, and it goes round in a circle. All those who dip into it will emerge with cold feet. It is indeed a remarkable likeness. I thank the design team for the imagination they have brought to this fascinating project. Least said, soonest mended. This was always Diana's motto.

Or if it wasn't, it certainly should have been. And let that be an end to it.

Martin Amis: Let's face it: we have to face it. Face it: we have to. So let's it-face.

When I first heard Diana Wales was dead, my first think-thought was, chialistically: so that's it, then. What I said to myself was: this is a nuclear holocaust of one, of uno.

What to make of it? Of it: what to make? Mind-fuzz was soon qualified by the following intuition: now that Diana is dead, she is no longer alive. Or put it another way: Diana has become her own diaspora. In the upturned punchball wreck of that Mercedes, that Nazi-pleasing four-wheeled automobolic vehicular vehicle, she has met her untimely (un:timely) finito. And so to the fountain, or "farn-tin", as they would term it, nomenclaturally, down my local ale-turd hostelry. The Diana whoosh-splurge is a memorial to one of the former planetary cohabitants of this planet upon which our species – homo-not-so-bloody-sapiens – continues to live, if you can call it living. My hope is this: this is my hope. If we, as a species, toss our children, our midget-brood, headlong into this fountain, it will serve to distract us for a turd-second from our nightmarish, our very-bad-dreamish, destiny. And that's about as much as we can ask. About as much: as we can ask.

Lady Heather Mills McCartney: It's what she would have wanted. To be honest, she told me just before she died that as I was her very best friend, she wanted her Memorial Fountain to commemorate me not her. "Stuff me, Heather," she said in the corridor of the Ritz that day. "What've I ever done? It's you that deserves a Memorial Fountain, not me". Nelson Mandela, Tony Blair and President Bush have all privately pledged their support for the re-naming. It's very humbling, you know.

Andrew Morton: In order to preserve the legacy of that much-misunderstood legacy, I am now prepared to reveal that I have learnt in strictest confidence that Diana spoke secretly to her former psychic healer and sometime herbal counsellor Ooona Shift-Pratley on the topic of her Memorial Fountain.

On Tuesday of last week, Diana appeared in a specially-arranged vision to Ooona Shift-Pratley. She was wearing an Alexander McQueen shift and Jimmy Choo shoes. "Ooona," she said. "Please ask my favourite writer Andrew Morton to pass our conversation on to all his many millions of devoted readers".

Diana revealed to Ooona that she had read my latest book, and found it a very accurate reflection of her innermost thoughts. She then went on to praise her Memorial Fountain, and, on a personal note, to urge me to keep writing about her, in book after book.

"Only Andrew ever captured the complicated person who was the real me, away from all the cliches" revealed Diana, the Queen of all our hearts, the lady who had so much love to give, the Fairytale Princess who never knew who to turn to when the rain set in.

Brian Sewell: Preposterous beyond endurance, grotesque in its sublime vulgarity, incompotently semi-circular and unpleasantly damp, revoltingly mawkish and tiresomely feminine, vapid, sickly, inelegant, sentimental, cumbersome, plodding, contemptibly municipal and rebarbatively ugly, overweening in its barbarity, flimsy in its execution, long-winded in its long-windedly long long-windiness, grievously barren, singularly commonplace, conceitedly over-extended, grubby, pusillanimous, slipshod and monstrous, wretchedly constructed, gravely flawed, wilfully dumb, modishly "child-friendly", kitsch, stomach-churning, vomit-inducing, incongruous, odiferous, pompous, drab, sewagey, regurgitatively moist and unendurably brackish, repulsive, repellent, unsightly, loathsome, misshapen, distorted and diarrhoetic, atrociously asinine, brutishly banal, catatonically crappy, doltishly dull, execrably elephantine, fearfully fake, gruesomely garish, heinously hideous *(cont. p 94)*

W.F. Deedes: Diana was, when all is said and done, a Princess. Very much so.

She married into the British Royal Family, and was the proud mother of two sons. This much we know. I always found her immensely attractive. Was she an Oxbridge postgraduate? Put on the spot, I would have to say that she probably was not. But she was able to talk and listen, and in the long run, that may be more important. I count myself a pretty shrewd judge of human character. If forced, I would say that, much like the rest of us, she had some failings, yes, but she had some fine qualities too. For me, the memorial reflects these twin aspect of her character. The French, that most Gallic of nations, have an expression for it. Plus ça change.

Michael Moore: FACT – Seen from the air, The so-called Diana Memorial Fountain spells out the letter O.

FACT – O is the first initial of Osama Bin Laden.

FACT – OO7 is the code name for Britain's Secret Service.

FACT – Oil begins with an O.

You thinking what I'm thinking? Yup.

So, um – anyone mind me asking?! Why exactly is it that the British Secret Service, led by Queen Elizabeth of England's husband, Prince Blair, has already drawn up plans to secretly helicopter Osama bin Laden onto this specially-marked spot in the centre of London, England for top-level talks on where to drill for oil?

And why is it they don't want YOU to know?

Jeez.

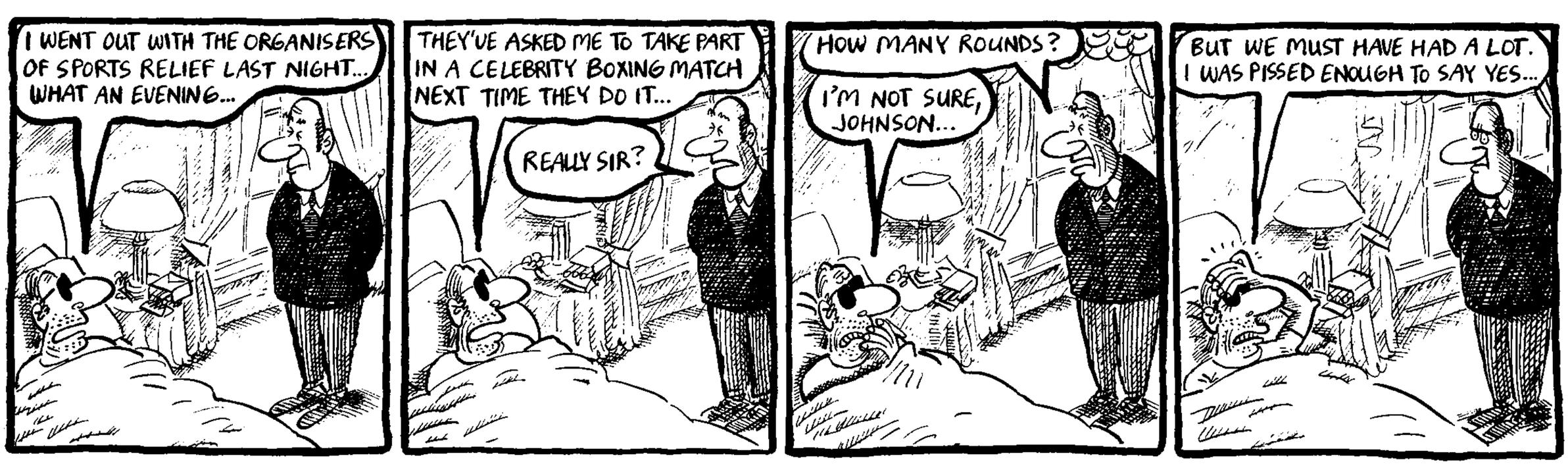
Pretty goddam scary – or what?

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I WENT OUT WITH THE ORGANISERS OF SPORTS RELIEF LAST NIGHT... WHAT AN EVENING...
THEY'VE ASKED ME TO TAKE PART IN A CELEBRITY BOXING MATCH NEXT TIME THEY DO IT...
REALLY SIR?
HOW MANY ROUNDS?
I'M NOT SURE, JOHNSON...
BUT WE MUST HAVE HAD A LOT. I WAS PISSED ENOUGH TO SAY YES...

Pseuds Corner

SOCCER SPECIAL

Not since Jason set out with his Argonauts in pursuit of the Golden Fleece has there been a Greek Odyssey to match the one which has unfolded in Portugal these past three weeks. Even Homer might struggle to do justice to the epic achievement of a team which caused a surprise simply by reaching Euro 2004.

GLENN MOORE
Independent

And as Beckham stepped up and blasted his penalty high over the bar, one remembered the words of Edgar, from King Lear: 'Is this the promised end/Or mere image of that horror?'

JASON COWLEY
Observer

Have you ever caught a bird that flies into your house and tried to hold it gently enough not to crush it, firmly enough not to release it prematurely? And have you taken it out into the garden and let it go and watched it fly? Because there are signs that Eriksson did that against Croatia.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

In England, it seems, Rooney has become the symbol of some dark, atavistic stirring deep within the national soul, the embodiment of ancient instincts and virtues, a national archetype unacknowledged since the dawn of the post-industrial age, not to mention a rude response to the previously irresistible rise of the metrosexual male.

RICHARD WILLIAMS
Guardian

"He's fat, he's Scouse, he'll rob your fucking house." Similarly, there is a joke doing the rounds on the net that shows an array of stolen goods falling out of his pockets during his cartwheel celebration against Switzerland.

The jibes play, of course, on the most crude terrace stereotype, yet their significance lies less in what they accuse Rooney of – the wholly unwarranted charge of housebreaking – than what they idolise him for: the unprepossessing manner in which he has stolen our affection.

ANDREW ANTHONY
Guardian

That picture in the Guardian of all the little clubs all over England hanging out their flags was one of the most moving sights I've seen since my first glimpse of the Raft of the Medusa. Sport is one of the few experiences of real community in a world tyrannised by individual egotism.

MARY KENNY
Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: Strobes, Dionea Watt, Mike Keedwell, G. Fisher, Pat Hurst, 'Barking Mad'.

£10 paid for all entries

Literary Review

Clever dick

The Fit
Philip Hensher
(Fourth Estate, £15.99)

THE first thing to be said about Mr Philip Hensher is that he is fearfully clever. Anyone will tell you that. And the second thing about him is that he is also wonderfully, elegantly, gaily, maddeningly, and did I say gaily, clever. And the third thing, also, but you probably already knew.

Hensh, as we shall think of him, or perhaps it should be The Hensh, is one of those people of whom it is sometimes said that he could not write a dull sentence if he tried. Well, now he has tried. He has tried very hard. And he has succeeded.

The narrator of this latest instalment of The Hensh oeuvre is an indexer. He compiles the indexes to other people's books with sad titles such as *Squid Through The Ages*. His name is John Carrington and he is, how shall we put this? An entry or two short of an index. When he looks at the world he can put things in order, but "it all seemed more or less equally significant".

He dutifully records for our benefit his not very original observations. City bankers wear red braces. Germans have no sense of humour. Holiday snaps are boring. People often tell lies on the phone. If you have lots of money "then I expect your girl will make herself generally available without being too difficult about it. I mean, you know, up the bum, or really anything at all." It is all a bit Forrest Gumpy and calls to mind that other clever novel about a boring man that didn't quite work, John Lanchester's *Mr Phillips*.

The wife of this gormless drudge is called Janet. ("Yes, yes, we are called Janet and John. We know.") In case the reader doesn't know why this is an amusing coincidence, Hensh reminds us that "everybody our age learnt to read" from the "pastel adventures of nicely-turned-out Janet and John." Oh, right. Not in the least contrived then.

What your Ladybird books never told you was that one day Janet leaves John and runs off to where she says on the phone is India, then Australia, but is actually a lonely and rather pathetic Greek island of the sort that Louis de Bernieres would long ago have turned into an unspoilt (but not for long) Mediterranean paradise seething with unresearched history. Hensh is content to leave things lonely and pathetic. And such is John's condition.

The day Janet leaves him John gets hiccups, which Hensh represents with an exclamation mark – ! – like that. Everyone John meets suggests a different cure, none of which – ! – work. These "ejaculations of grief" just keep coming until, finally, his wife returns and then they stop.

In the intervening period, John wanders about doing nothing in particular, sees his family, goes to work, and gets involved with a conceptual artist who makes him the subject of her latest project. Hensh has a lot of fun describing her unspeakable artist friends. One of them is an ugly woman who has made plaster casts of the dicks of all the men she sleeps with. So after two years she has "like two hundred dicks all moulded in plaster". "Two hundred?" "Two hundred, yeah, what you saying? You've got a problem with that?" Given Hensh's well-known spat with a certain female YBA, one wonders: whom can he mean?

Gobbets of family history are sneezed out from time to time, in between remarks about his sister's snobbery (she looks down on everyone, even herself), his mother's vagueness, his father's fretting over details. The crucial fact is that when she was a teenager John's other sister was brutally raped and murdered. This seems to have permanently affected the rest of the family. The description of the immediate aftermath of these tragic events is well handled and would even have been quite moving but for Hensher's smart-alecky authorial intrusions. "Into the suffering of her mind in those two weeks we will not enter." Shut up, you pompous git.

Hensh is either too clever to stay in character or just afraid of genuine feeling. Ever the nimble *pasticheur*, he keeps peeping out from the behind his puppets, winking at his smart, metropolitan audience. Despite the title, his mix of faux-naif cynicism and heartbreaking tragedy doesn't fit.

The fashionably post-modern idea of a book consisting of nothing but an index is rather half-heartedly explored at one point, but in the end Hensh contents himself with providing a jokey but incomplete index of the novel's contents. Here are some of the entries he missed: Anus, see bum, intercourse up the, 13, 164. Art, all basically shit, 199. Balls: see testicles, aching, 81. Condom, spunk-filled, 81. Cunt, cunty, 75, 164. Fuck, fucking, 19, 57, 102, 108, 140, 186, etc. All very hootworthy, once you get the hang of it.

But do you really care?

Books & Bookmen

■ *PENGUIN, Britain's second biggest publisher, wrote to hundreds of its authors two weeks ago admitting that the cock-up which has prevented their books reaching the shops – and has already cost more than £1m in lost sales – will continue until Christmas at least.*

It's all the fault of Penguin's new "state-of-the-art automated warehouse" which was meant to use robots and computers to carry out work previously done by human beings, but has been paralysed by technical problems ever since it came into operation in April.

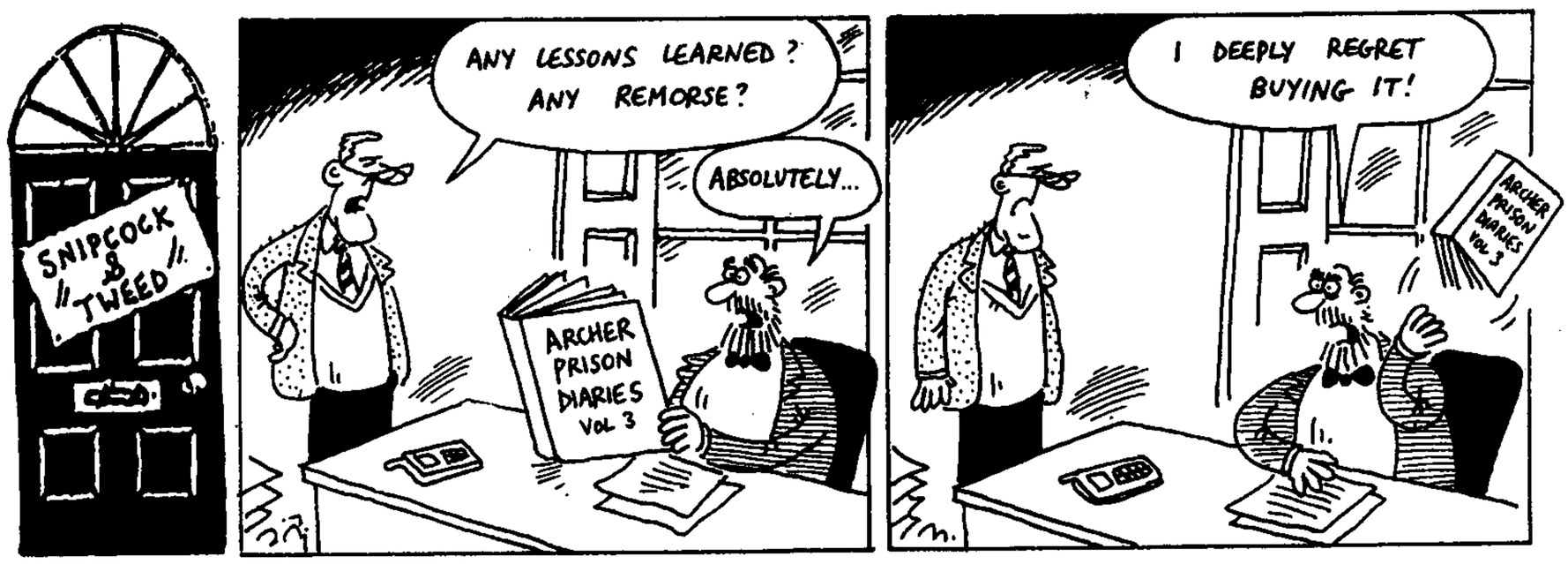
An important story, and one which has been reported in most serious newspapers – with the conspicuous exception of the Financial Times, *which has yet to run a word about the fiasco. Might this by any chance be related to the fact that Penguin's parent company, Pearson, also happens to own the FT?*

■ HAVING apologised to actress Keira Knightley for spelling her name wrong on its front cover, *Vogue* will now have to grovel in a similar manner to a couple of the beautiful people of publishing.

An absurd feature about the Hay Literary Festival in the August issue was garlanded with pictures of bookish types – including Caroline Michel with her head, for some reason, nestling in Jamie Byng of Canongate's lap.

One picture showed a grasp of agents captioned as Ed Victor, Deborah Rogers, Georgia Garrett and Jonny Geller. All very well, except that the person billed as Geller of Curtis Brown was in fact the taciturn Peter Straus, Rogers's colleague at Rogers, Coleridge and White. The transposition is unlikely to have gone down well in either camp.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
ANY LESSONS LEARNED? ANY REMORSE?
ABSOLUTELY...
ARCHER PRISON DIARIES VOL 3
I DEEPLY REGRET BUYING IT!
ARCHER PRISON DIARIES VOL 3

IN THE BACK

ENERGY

Coincidence corner

TONY BLAIR is apparently considering building a new generation of nuclear power stations to meet Britain's power needs.

The last time the government decided such a thing, there was an explosion of public debate on the nuclear question, including a massive public inquiry. But this time, on 1 July, a new set of regulations – the uranium enrichment technology (prohibition on disclosure) regulations 2004 – were "laid before the House" by the government.

On 12 July these regulations were introduced by the minister responsible, Stephen Timms, at a standing committee whose proceedings are not published in the regular daily Hansard. They would, he said, "penalise disclosures made with intent to assist a uranium enrichment programme or disclosures that are made recklessly".

Timms highlighted the danger that uranium enrichment might lead to terrorists getting nuclear weapons. In the prevailing atmosphere of terror of terrorism, and after a very brief welcome from the Tory spokesman Michael Fabricant, the regulations glided through the Commons without a hitch. Not a single MP raised an objection.

When the new rules came to the Lords the following day, however, the minister Lord Triesman didn't get quite such an easy ride. The Lib Dem environment spokeswoman there, Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (right), doubted whether the new regulations were proportionate. What the government was doing, she said, just at the time that ministers contemplated a new expansion of nuclear power, was to draw a "veil of secrecy" over the nuclear industry that would obstruct public criticism and debate.

"With these regulations," she said, "it will be much harder to ask questions about the safety of the processes. How will public meetings be held, especially public inquiries where detailed information should be disclosed with regard to new planning permissions for example? I notice that the regulations cover buildings, so presumably those planning permissions will take place on buildings which no one should know about and no one can discuss."

To these questions, there was no credible reply and the regulations duly became law.

Core values

ROY ANDERSON, the new head of British Energy's eight nuclear power stations, was previously in charge of an American atomic power company investigated for its inadequate safety culture.

Anderson, appointed chief nuclear officer at British Energy in June, came to the job from PSEG Nuclear, a US generator where he was president. In January, America's nuclear regulatory commission (NRC) ordered PSEG Nuclear, which runs the Hope Creek and Salem reactors in New Jersey, to prepare an action plan to improve safety.

The order followed allegations from a sacked whistleblower and others at the company. In addition, the NRC's own inspections had uncovered "low to moderately serious" violations in 2003 when a nuclear leak contaminated groundwater and the inspectors worried about plant managers' "ineffective" response to these problems.

Shortly before Anderson left PSEG for British Energy, the NRC wrote to him saying there were concerns about the stations' work and ability to address potential safety issues. The inspectors were worried about "the extent to which a safety conscious work environment exists at the stations". Happily there are no such worries at British Energy, where a spokesman rejected any criticism of Mr Anderson's appointment.

A gem from Ofgem

MORE on last summer's electricity blackout and the absurdly delayed official Ofgem verdict on why it happened (see last *Eye*).

While the delay was an attempt to avoid admitting, while people were still angry, that the privatised National Grid had cocked it up, even worse was the decision of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem), the arbiter between energy utilities and customers, not to punish the culprits.

The blackouts in London and Birmingham at the height of last summer were caused, says Ofgem, by human error. Some employees and unions reckon the human error was management's and its failure to provide enough investment and staff. But Ofgem disagreed. It had to or it too would have been seen as negligent.

In an extraordinary somersault, however, Ofgem then said that the company responsible, National Grid Transco, will in future incur automatic fines that could run into millions of pounds – but this time it wouldn't suffer even a small, token penalty.

According to Ofgem the blackout was due to "a series of unrelated events, some of which were the result of mistakes by National Grid Transco... What went wrong was not material enough for the authority to find NGC in breach of its legal obligations." These are "to operate, develop and maintain an efficient, co-ordinated and economical electricity transmission system." Which is precisely what it failed to do.

The delayed Ofgem report reveals not only that electricity privatisation was a gamble but also that the way in which a vital service industry is now being controlled is an invitation to blackouts. Hospitals, railways and other essential public services would be advised to ensure their back-up generators are working.

CHARITY

Tale of Coleridge

CHARITIES and others who may have recently lost money to the Fruitful group of "chugging" companies – the ones where you are stopped in the street or doorstepped for direct debit donations to good causes – have only themselves to blame.

Chris Coleridge, the man behind Fruitful, has a history of such failed ventures with unpaid debts to charities and the Inland Revenue. Last year the *Eye* reported how his first company, Open Air Fundraising, was wound up with debts of £1.8m and how it had been paying its two shareholders – one of them Coleridge himself – dividends of £367,000 out of non-existent reserves.

Just before it was forced into liquidation, Coleridge and his then partner Andy Holliday sold the assets, but not the liabilities, to Open Air Global, who just happened to be, er, themselves. Global in turn became Fruitful Face to Face, which with its sister company Fruitful Door to Door have now also gone bust with even more debts. Last week hundreds of staff were laid off without warning and without pay.

Coleridge has declined to respond to calls from the *Eye* about Fruitful, but last year when we contacted him about his business practices, he blamed bad publicity surrounding the "charity mugging" industry. Much of it, unfortunately, generated by him.

Audit-acious!

IS THERE no end to the government's determination to make life easier for the big four accountancy firms?

In its first term "new" Labour allowed them to form limited liability partnerships that protected their partners from being sued for their mistakes. Now the firms are clamouring for more: they want the government to "cap" the amount they have to pay out for producing dodgy audits.

It seems everyone in the City knows this is self-serving nonsense. Even the Association of British Insurers denounces the proposal as removing the incentive to provide a proper audit. But the accountancy firms are pressing on and getting support from the department of trade and industry and its secretary of state, Patricia Hewitt.

Hewitt knows how awful it is when a big accountancy firm gets into trouble over its audits. From 1994 to 1996 she was head of research at Andersen Consulting when its sister organisation was the big American accountant, Arthur Andersen, which so successfully audited the accounts of, er, the corrupt energy giant Enron.

Arthur Andersen went bust itself before the partners could make the most of their good fortune in being reinstated by "new" Labour as fit for work for the British government after the Thatcher government had banned the firm for cheating over the notorious crook John de Lorean. Not that the connection between Labour and Arthur Andersen has been completely severed. On 14 June, cabinet office minister Douglas Alexander revealed in the Commons that three staff had been "seconded" from Deloittes to work in the cabinet office on "public service reform" (cuts and sackings). He explained: "Two of these staff were seconded to the department while working for Arthur Andersen, but subsequently became Deloitte employees, following a corporate take-over in August 2002."

So even if your corrupt firm goes bust, you can still keep your job in the cabinet office...

JUST FANCY THAT!

EXPERTS in forensic psychiatry, mental health and offending behaviour attended a "Care Not Containment" conference in Nottingham last month aimed at addressing how to deal with mentally disordered offenders.

Unfortunately the evening's events were interrupted when police were called to deal with a prison officer from a special unit. He was apparently attacking his wife and displaying all the traits of the dangerous people he worked with. The incident was investigated by police and the prison service but no charge has been brought.

The Loan Deranger

THOUSANDS of new students will have to be given emergency payments or be left penniless at the start of term thanks to the Student Loans Company's brand new computer system, PROtoCOL.

The system was described by one local council as "extremely slow... It constantly breaks down... It regularly loses information that has been logged on and is at times totally inaccessible."

The department for education and skills (DfES) insists that "teething problems" will be ironed out and all 9,000 loan applications will be processed in time. However, insiders suggest they will fall around 2,000 short, necessitating costly emergency payments.

Meanwhile Buckinghamshire county council has had to bring in extra staff to cope with the system's constant crashing and Wandsworth council meanwhile said last month that under the old system it would have completed nearly 95 percent of applications by May. With PROtoCOL it had managed 39.5 percent.

Less than super, Bupa

ONE member of staff has been sacked and two suspended over allegations concerning the welfare of residents at Isard House, the Bupa care home in Kent that was at the centre of whistleblowing allegations of abuse and neglect five years ago. (see Eyes passim).

Bupa said the sacked care worker had failed to record details of a fall suffered by an elderly resident and failed to alert the family. Investigations were continuing. A source suggested that other allegations from both staff and families were also being pursued, including issues of medication and nightcare, and that action against others may follow.

The private care giant told the *Eye* that the investigation was launched following allegations from other staff members. "We take this matter extremely seriously and are investigating thoroughly. We have informed the Commission for Social Care Inspection and are working with them to implement any improvements necessary."

Last week the CSCI said it was satisfied with the action Bupa was taking and that none of the home's 66 residents were at risk. But two recent CSCI reports have criticised a number of issues in the home, including the high numbers of "incidents and accidents" involving residents: there were 29 accident and emergency admissions over the past year. Many took place at night or early morning and were apparently not witnessed.

The latest report also highlighted:

- Poor staff training (only two percent of staff instead of 50 percent are trained to NVQ level 2), particularly in relation to pressure care, epilepsy, continence, nutrition and diabetes.
- Lack of adequate assessment of care and needs – even for residents with serious conditions.
- Too few staff at weekends.
- Some criminal records checks had not been done.
- The pooling into one bank account of all the residents' money.

Eye readers will recall that five years ago seven care workers at the home revealed a catalogue of neglect and abuse in the high-dependency unit. Old people had been left in their own mess, had catheters overflowing, were roughly handled and inappropriately drugged.

In October 2002 a coroner recorded an "open" verdict on 83-year-old Audrey Ford after hearing that she had been taken to Bromley Hospital rigid and suffering uncontrollable spasms – the side effects of powerful anti-psychotic drugs that she had been given in the home. Her daughter is pursuing claims that her mother was inappropriately medicated and overdosed.

Eileen Chubb, one of the whistleblowers who now runs a charity called Compassion in Care, said she was horrified that five years down the line, there were still concerns about Isard House.

Bupa recently gave lengthy evidence to the Commons health committee investigating abuse of the elderly. It argued against the introduction of any more regulations, claiming existing rules were adequate to safeguard vulnerable people in care homes.

Curfew what a scorcher

LET'S hope the new army of police-on-the-cheap, aka "community support officers" (CSOs), who are about to hit the streets thanks to Gordon Brown's generous budget, are more gainfully employed than those in Richmond, south-west London.

A reader contacted the *Eye* after his law-abiding son and a friend – who were doing what many 14-year-olds do after school: namely browsing the CD and DVD collections in record shops in the town – fell foul of a CSO.

The teenagers noticed a uniformed character watching them from behind a pillar in WH Smith and then following them on to HMV. As they left the shop he introduced himself as a community support officer, accused them of acting suspiciously and issued them with a leaflet including a ringed map of Richmond marked "Designated Dispersal Area".

"Should you be required to leave this area by a Police Officer or a Community Support Officer, you must do so immediately. Failure to comply may render you liable to arrest, which could be punishable by three months' imprisonment and/or a fine up to £2,500," it said.

The boys were said to have been devastated by the encounter and are now fearful that if they want to set foot in Smith's, HMV or Richmond town centre again, they will be arrested and locked up. Their parents were outraged and no doubt the shops will have something to say if overzealous CSOs affect their lucrative trade with young people.

Such draconian over-reactions are down to the highly controversial section 30 of home secretary David Blunkett's anti-social behaviour act, which enables PC Knacker (or his stand-in) to order "persons in a group" (two can be a group) to disperse if they think any member of the public might be "intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed".

The new legislation also gives police power to impose a night-time curfew on anyone under 16 who is unaccompanied by an adult and in a designated area after 9pm – even if he or she has done absolutely nothing wrong.

JUST FANCY THAT!

THE beauty of hedge funds, recently promoted by the government to allow pension funds to invest in them, can be gleaned from the success of Boston-based K Capital Partners.

In May its high-powered analysts spotted a bargain: the disaster-prone private finance initiative (PFI) company, Jarvis, whose shares, the fund managers decided, were undervalued. It snapped up 13 percent of Jarvis shares at about 80p each. Today they are worth around 25p and falling...

CHILD JAILS

Pin number

THE death of a 15-year-old boy at a Secure Training Centre has brought to light the astonishing number of times serious restraint methods are used on children held in Britain's child jails.

Gareth Myatt, 15, died in hospital in Coventry on 19 April after losing consciousness while being restrained by staff using a "seated double embrace" at Rainsbrook STC. The Youth Justice Board is holding an urgent review into the method of restraint in which two members of staff pin a youngster in an upright sitting position to a chair or bed.

Whenever a restraint is used, it must be recorded. In response to a written question last month from Rudi Vis MP last month, home office minister Paul Goggins revealed that restraint had been used around 11,000 times in the three STCs since 1999. In Medway alone in 2003, restraint was used 1,611 times.

The maximum combined population of the STCs is 194 youngsters; many are 14 or younger and many are girls. The three centres are all privately run: Medway and Rainsbrook by Group 4 and Hassockfield by Serco-owned Premier Prisons.

Prison reform charity the Howard League is setting up its own inquiry into Gareth's death. The league's director Frances Crook said the number of times restraint was used was astonishing. "Are they making *any* effort to talk to the young people?" she asked.

PFI

Ill windfall

AS IF private finance initiatives providing new schools, hospitals, prisons and roads weren't costly enough, the scale of additional windfall profits – those made simply by refinancing the PFI deal with the banks once the buildings are up – has now been revealed by the treasury.

The revelation comes in response to questions from Labour MPs Michael Meacher (right) and Alan Simpson, who asked for details of all projects that have effectively been "remortagaged". The answer was a staggering 40 projects, with a total profit for the private contractors of £334m.

Under a voluntary code that came into force in September 2002, taxpayers will be able to claw back just 30 percent of that – but over a 30-year period. In the meantime, firms like Carillion, Balfour Beatty, John Laing and others get the cash lump sums straight into their profit and loss accounts.

For example, the £214m M1-A1 link road notched up an £11m windfall profit for Balfour Beatty. But that wasn't the only nice big earner. A number of other road-building programmes saw similar gains for Balfour, including £3.75m on the £75m A30/A35 from Exeter to Bere.

Jarvis and Barclays, who were behind PFI school schemes in Haringey and Bridlington, have enjoyed windfall spoils of £4m. But the biggest winners were those behind the PFI hospitals. Four of these have now been refinanced: the Royal Calderdale in Halifax; Dartford and Gravesham; Norwich and Norfolk; and the Princess Royal in Farnborough. In total the private contractors, including Carillion, John Laing and Taylor Woodrow, divvied up the £177m profits. (With, as *Eye* readers well know, disastrous results for patients, staff and taxpayers.)

A very healthy return?

The day after the NHS Confederation (which represents all organisations in the NHS) denounced the private finance initiative as "inflexible, complicated and expensive", Richard Jewson (right), the DIY millionaire, launched TPIC (The PFI Infrastructure Company).

The aim of his company, says chairman Jewson, is to buy stakes in PFI projects; and he has made a good start by buying stakes in 14 projects from a fund called the Quayle Munro PFI fund, partly owned by the Bank of Scotland.

Jewson drooled: "PFI investments are appropriate for matching long-term liabilities, because the contracts are usually for 25 or 30 years... We anticipate an enthusiastic response from the City." He hoped for a good return from his investment and assumes that these PFI stakes, "safe" for 25 or 30 years because the government or NHS (ie taxpayers) are paying the bills, will go on being profitably bought and sold into the distant future.

Mr Jewson is an old hand at "refinancing". He is chairman of Octagon Healthcare Holdings, the company which owns the Norfolk and Norwich hospital, built (and sold) under one of the earlier PFI schemes and then "re-financed" at a profit to the Octagon consortium (John Laing; Barclays; etc) of some £90m.

Mr Jewson's new company will be based in the Isle of Man, where its massive and guaranteed income from public bodies will not be taxed.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE main reason for the FUKU retailer Philip Green's second failure to take over Marks & Spencer was his refusal to put his 400p a share cash offer on the table.

From the get-go all three proposed Green offers were "virtual" bids, dependent on a variety of conditions most, if not all of which, M&S was expected to and duly did reject; but any one of which provided the king of Arcadia with a ready made way out. Some expert Green watchers predicted from the initial M&S rejection that he would eventually walk away – which several weeks and probably a million or more in fees later he duly did.

A key reason for that suspicion was Green's demand that the bid be recommended by M&S. This was a condition Green could hardly have realistically believed achievable unless he bid far higher than he was prepared to go – well north of 400p. Green had already been squeezed into raising his offer by more than 50p cash before he gave up, suggesting there was far less in it for him – unlike at Bhs and Arcadia which he bought cheaply.

But why did the brash billionaire not want or even relish a hostile bid battle? The FUKU retailer is hardly a man who shuns the limelight and avoids confrontation. Consider his expletive undeleted lapel-grabbing tête-à-tête with chief executive Stuart Rose outside the M&S headquarters. His on-screen row with Jon Snow of Channel 4 News.

Well on some matters Ming the Merciless, like his Boswellian chum and dinner companion, BBC business editor Jeff Randall, is rather sensitive. His friendship with divorcee Aida Hersham for example. That relationship – which Green now admits but says is all in the past – did not exactly delight his Monaco-based wife Tina. Green needs to keep Tina sweet as she is a key figure in the tax structure designed to preserve the Bhs/Arcadia fortune permanently from the hands of the British taxman. While Green pays UK tax as a director on his salary, all the dividends paid offshore are understood to avoid tax because they are paid to family trusts established by the probably non-domiciled and certainly non-resident Tina Green. Any divorce could be very, very expensive.

Green is said to have been concerned that a hostile bid would have seen a repeat of previous occasions when private detectives have been hired to put his private life under the microscope. The sudden rehashing of the Aida Hersham story by the *Mail on Sunday* days before he dropped out may have confirmed all his suspicions about a possible "dirty tricks" campaign if he went hostile. Even a man as blameless as Philip Green might be concerned.

A revisiting of the Amber Day years and before might also result in the unjustified reappearance of references to such colourful friends and associates from those days as Tony Schneider, the connected West End money-lender once well known in London casinos, or jailed Landhurst Leasing boss Ted Ball.

All of this would have been totally unmerited and supremely irrelevant to the bid for M&S; but if the battle had become down and dirty then who knows what might have been said or suggested, however unfair. Mercifully now this threat has evaporated. So the FUKU retailer can return to Monaco, his secrets safe. And if there is a third run at M&S – possible if Rose has not worked his magic act within the next two years – then any cash offer from Green is likely to be irresistible to the M&S board.

Ironically the spotless Stuart Rose suspected investigators acting for Green had been accessing

"Got any snails you want getting rid of Missus?"

his mobile phone records and his wife's bank account details. Green denied he had hired any private investigators. However, his advisers Goldman Sachs – who said nothing – have a longstanding record of employing Kroll Associates. Indeed they acted as advisers to Kroll on its recent takeover by insurance giant Marsh & McLennan. Not surprisingly therefore insiders say Kroll had indeed been retained to work against M&S. Kroll of course does not itself access phone or bank records. But it knows the handful of independent contractors who do – as do many national newspapers.

Some years ago Kroll was hired by another US bank to investigate Green. Its report pointed to his alleged closeness in Monaco with the Reuben brothers, profitable dealers in M&S options ahead of the Green offer, and Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky.

By yet another coincidence Kroll were also hired to prove to the world that Simon and David Reuben were as pure as the driven snow. That assignment lead to the recently settled libel action between the Reubens and *Fortune* magazine. The 2000 article had been inspired by Kroll in an ill-advised move to clear the Reubens of any associations with Russian organised crime figures such as Michael Chernoy. The Reubens ended up with what reads suspiciously like a non-apology and no damages.

One sound reason for Green's "virtual" bid tactic was that no formal bid means no giant fees to the banks that make it possible. So by not putting down the 400p, Green avoided the humungous arrangement fees payable to Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, HBOS, Royal Bank of Scotland and Barclays Capital for making available £7.5bn of the proposed £9.1bn bid.

Green and his offshore family interests were said to be putting up the remaining £1.6bn. Most if not all of this, it was suspected, would in effect have been provided by way of bank loans possibly to be repaid later from M&S assets if the bid went through.

Green is very familiar with such circular transactions. Seven months after the takeover of Bhs in May 2000 for £82.3m cash (actually £38m after deducting the cash in the store chain), Green did a sale and leaseback transaction effectively with himself on a selected parcel of Bhs properties. Carmen Properties, a Green family company registered in Jersey, paid £105,875,000 to Bhs Group, another Green family company. On that same day, 20 December, Bhs Group paid an interim dividend of £100,035,000, mostly to the Green family. Now either the dividend largely paid for the properties and the money went back into Bhs or the properties were bought with perhaps the help of bank finance which was largely repaid from the dividend. It all depends which came first – sale and leaseback or dividend. Green not only knows about retailing, he is also skilled in financial engineering.

THE phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed has found himself caught out by another change in accounting standards. Just as the now celebrated FRS17 exposed a large hole in the Harrods pension fund – £85m according to the latest results to January 2004 – so a little noticed change to FRS5 which covers "revenue recognition" has resulted in a major reduction in sales at the Knightsbridge store.

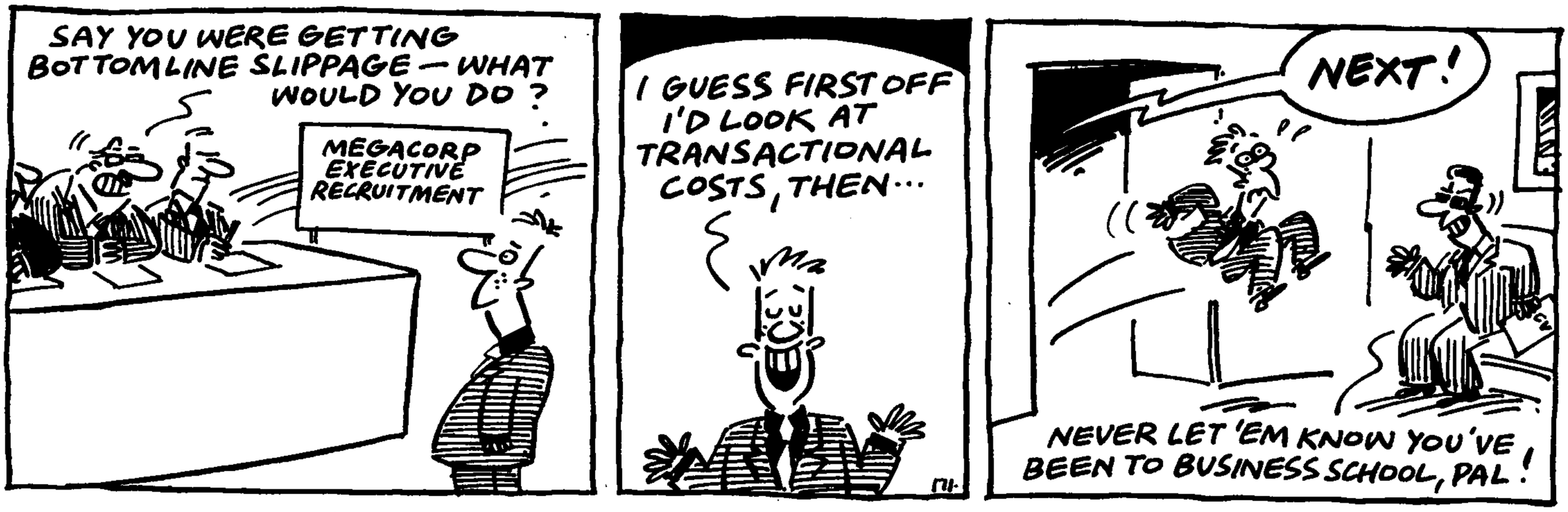
FRS5 now stipulates that sales by concessionaires in a store must be excluded from the store's own revenue. Harrods hosts a number of such retail concessions. Also to be deducted are the cost of discounts and returns. It seems Fayed has been including the former and making no or inadequate provision for the two latter items.

Hey presto. Harrods sales for 2004 instead of being £472m become £329m and those already reported for 2003 were really not £461m but £325m. The good news for Fayed is that this means margins have risen as profits have not suffered any similar reduction because they had not been similarly flattered.

Cutting costs at Harrods meant that despite a miniscule increase in revenue which barely matched inflation, pre-tax profits were almost trebled from £7m to £20m. After tax there was a profit of £15m but Harrods still paid up a dividend of £27m which was duly paid out in full by its parent Harrods Holdings as a dividend to Fayed entities offshore. The previous year the dividend

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


SAY YOU WERE GETTING BOTTOMLINE SLIPPAGE — WHAT WOULD YOU DO ?
MEGACORP EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT
I GUESS FIRST OFF I'D LOOK AT TRANSACTIONAL COSTS, THEN···
NEXT !
NEVER LET 'EM KNOW YOU'VE BEEN TO BUSINESS SCHOOL, PAL !

was £11.5m, even though profits were only £3m.

The generous but unearned dividend is evidence of Fayed's need for cash to finance ventures such as Fulham, where unscrambling the for now abandoned plans to redevelop Craven Cottage have seemingly necessitated the early repayment of a £15m deposit plus interest provided in 2002 by the proposed developer.

COMMERZBANK is said to be discovering a series of expensive problems in Thailand and the Philippines as part of its legacy from the takeover of Jupiter Asset Management. These stem from the property investments made by the Asia Land Fund and two related Bermuda-based funds.

The valuations of these funds played a key role in the price Commerzbank paid for the minority 25 percent of Jupiter four years ago. Fees generated from the Thai land deals greatly boosted Jupiter's profits. But since then queries have been raised about the prices paid by the offshore funds for their property investments. Recently Commerzbank has found unexpected difficulties in trying to sell one of the major holdings near Bangkok due to access and construction problems. Suspected issues with asbestos are also rumoured in the Philippines.

'Slicker'

VIRGIN TERRITORY

ALTHOUGH Sir Richard Branson is eagerly hyping the imminent stock-market flotation of his Virgin Mobile phone business, City investors and pundits seem underwhelmed.

Edmond Warner, head of the financial trading company IFX, suggested in the *Grauniad* that maybe it's because they remember the Virgin Group's previous float in 1986 – an experiment that lasted for just two years.

Warner's piece prompted a huffy letter to the paper from Beardie Branson insisting that he was happy to recall what happened in the 1980s: "We floated our record company – delivering everything we promised, including a doubling of profits – only to run into the stock market crash of 1987 which halved share prices. We were praised by the City and most commentators for offering everyone their money back at the original share price."

Er, not quite. If Beardie has forgotten what really happened he can refresh his memory by consulting Tom Bower's unauthorised biography, which includes a detailed account of Branson's 1988 scheme to make the Virgin Group a private company again. He found a private buyer for the shares in the form of Japanese businessman Akira Ijichi, who was persuaded to pay just over £94m for a 25 percent stake – thus valuing the company at £377m. Two months later, Virgin's shareholders agreed to sell their shares back to Branson at a price which valued the company at £248m.

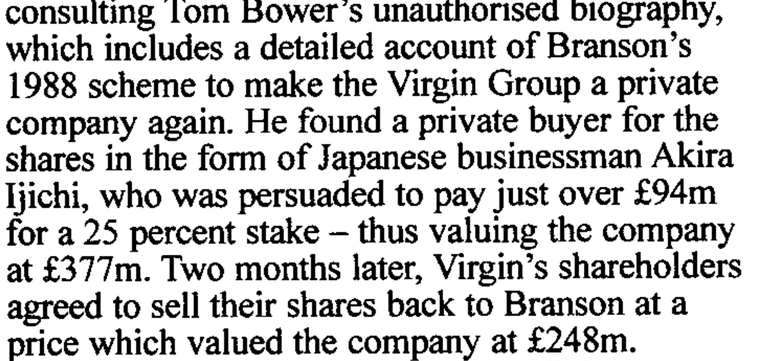
Had they known that under Beardie's deal with Ijichi the Virgin Group was actually worth £139m more than they had been offered, they might have demanded a rather higher price. But neither they nor Virgin's two non-executive directors did know – because Beardie omitted to tell them.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

The bearded wonder's last float*

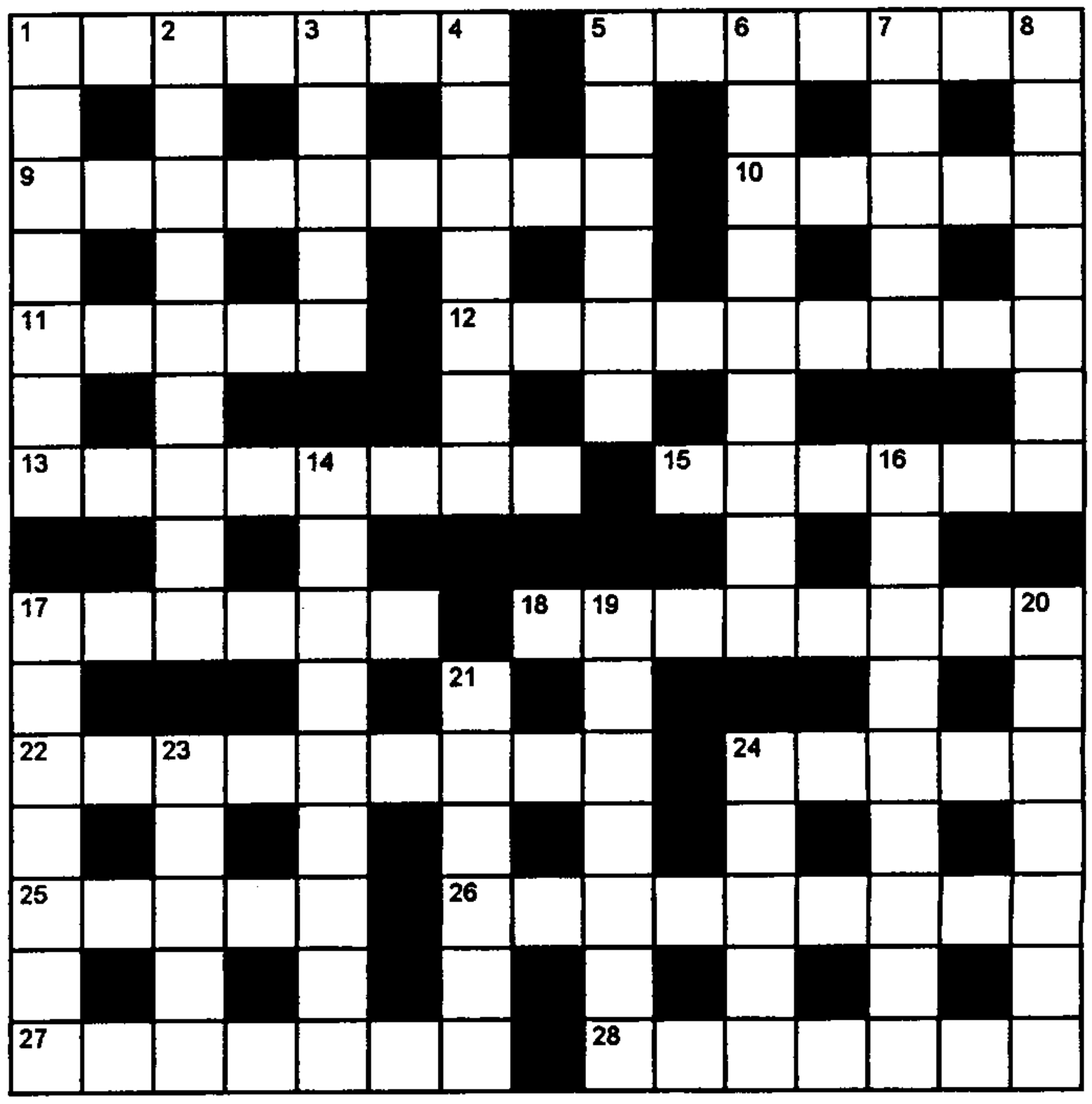
Winners and losers at Virgin Blue...



*as he prepares to float Virgin Mobile in London

EYE CROSSWORD 266

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 30 July 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1/13/15 The trigger for the real trouble to start ... just as number two is broadcast (4,3,4,4,3,3)

5 Solicitor Patterson boils (7)

9 Defamatory cartoonist probes US oil fiasco (9)

10 Given a different topping, belly's delicious (5)

11 Embed popular shag (5)

12 Not knowing it's nice getting tossed without organ transplant (9)

13 See 1ac.

17 Girl getting end away with our celeb's not tart (6)

18 VD hazard, balls (8)

22 How a 'liberated' country might see Bush: pointless gross arse needing good replacement (9)

24 Right out of underwear, set out to ensure hot flesh stays succulent (5)

25 See 5dn.

26 The bird to get on the wrong side of Clinton? (9)

27 Return of disease about genital area points (7)

28 BBC correspondent: "Blair is doing U-turn on issue" (7)

DOWN

1 Lew's up on 'Archerisms' and rubber wear (7)

2 Maintaining a stiff one (9)

3 Set to relate Tony's end? (5)

4 Frequent user of Eye, we hear, is to get buggered (7)

5/25 Member's presentation pack disgracefully pushing co-op (6,5)

6 Ken's thing might exclude wife from adulation (9)

7 At first, Lord Gnome loses head getting an erection – fruity thing (5)

8 Saucy source of OBN, yes, with a twist (3,4)

14 Flog off-shore MP organiser (9)

16 Woodland family's no time for retractable chopper covers (9)

17 Non-PC child corrector's tart (7)

19 Bacon strips, a new source for erections (7)

20 Agent to Labour's leader stuck in lavatory bowl: "Organise ahead" (7)

21 Popsy, cheerleader, does possess a mind! (6)

23 Good to rule out punishing diet (5)

24 A couple of tits see the point in Big Bang (5)

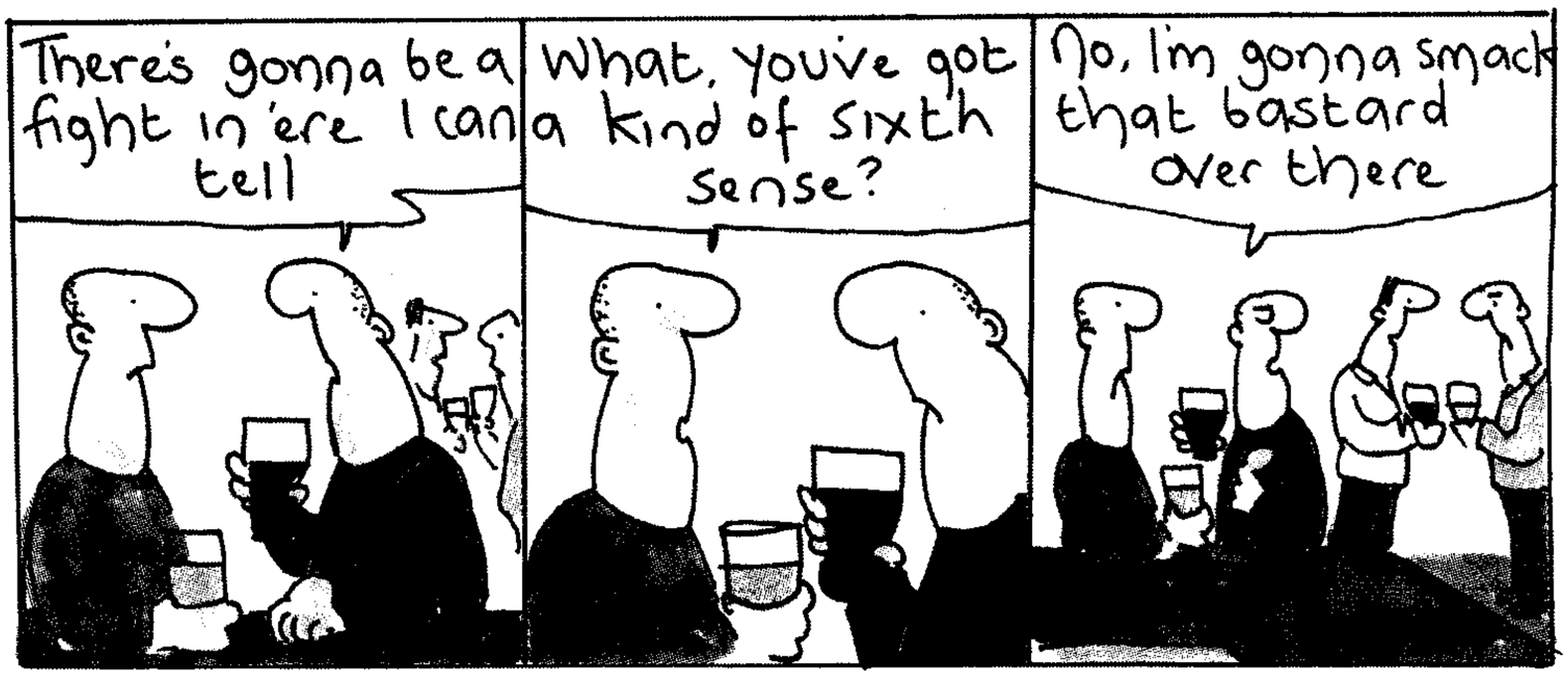
Crossword 265 winner: EILEEN HOLROYD

ACROSS: 1 Bangalore 6 Set up 9 Tudor 10 Two-legged 11 Overdue 12 Habitué 13/15 Knee-trembler 19 Bristols 20 Sexy 23 Toolkit 25 Tetanus 27 At leisure 28 Rider 29 Kodak 30 Schooners.

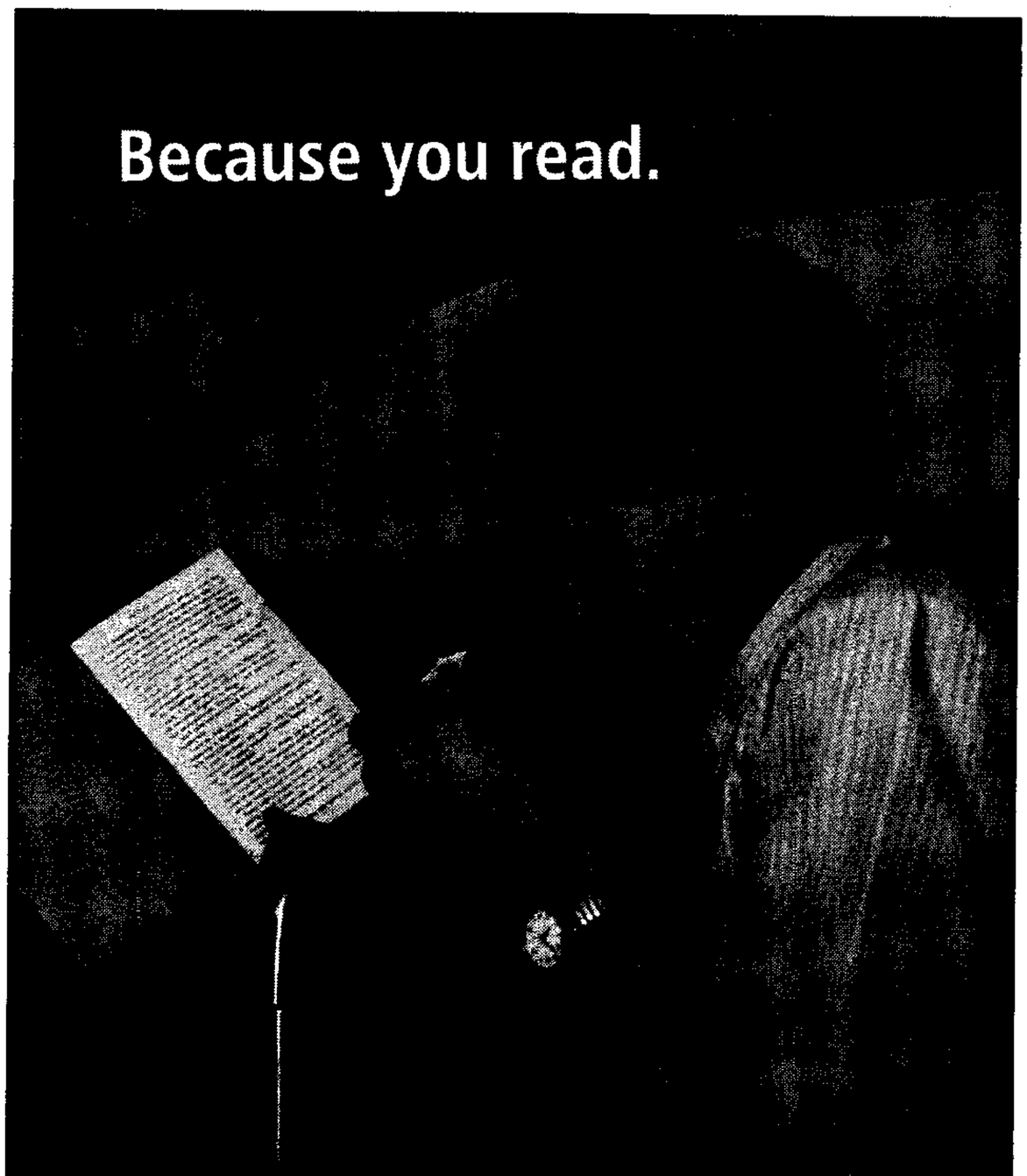
DOWN: 1 Buttocks 2/26/17 Nudge nudge wink wink 3 Abrade 4 On the trot 5 Epoch 6 Skewbald 7 Tight arse 8 Padded 14 Embroiled 16 Milk-teeth 18 Eyesores 21 Attack 22 Stereo 24 Truss.

YOBS

HUSBAND



Because you read.



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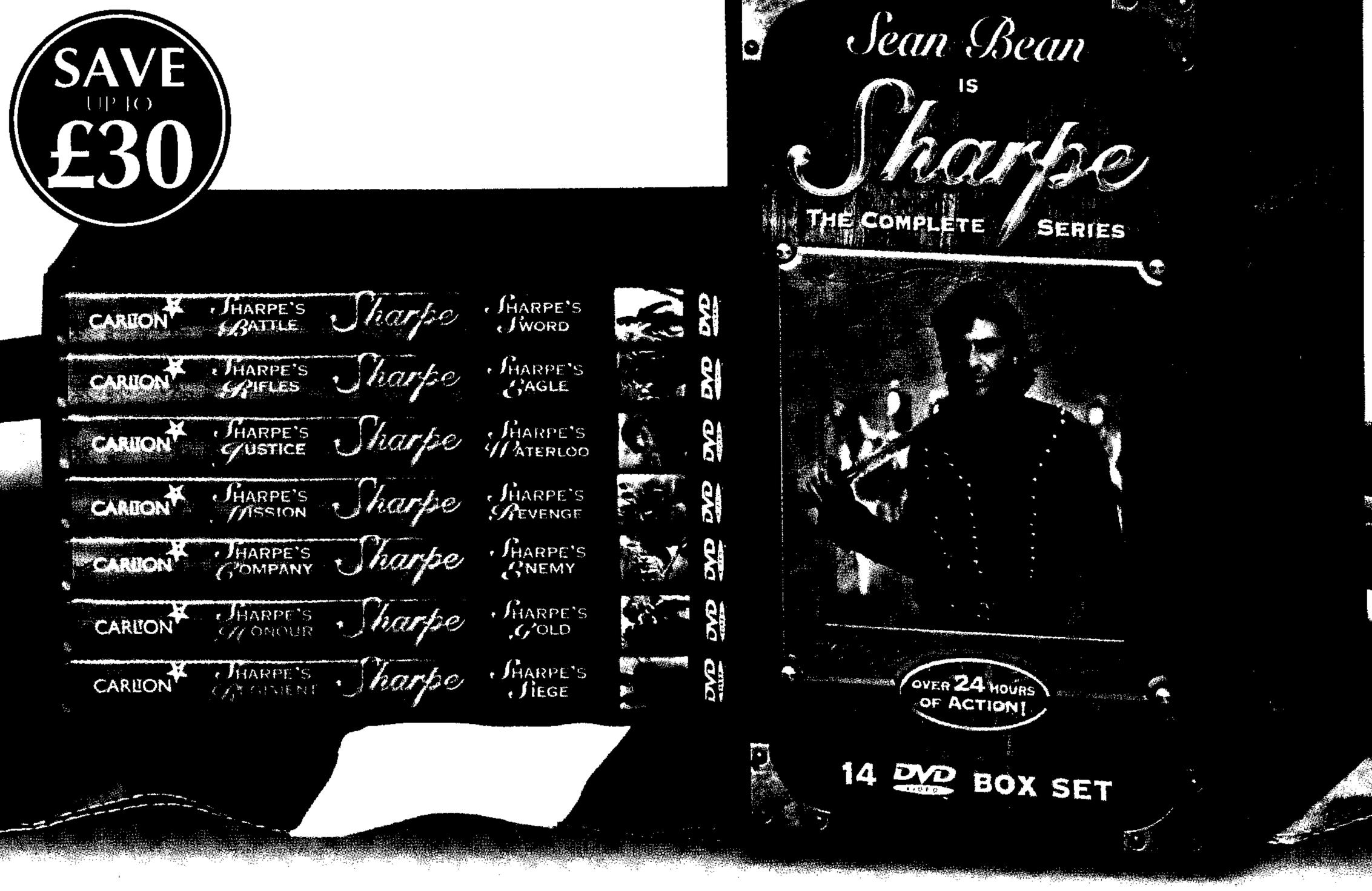

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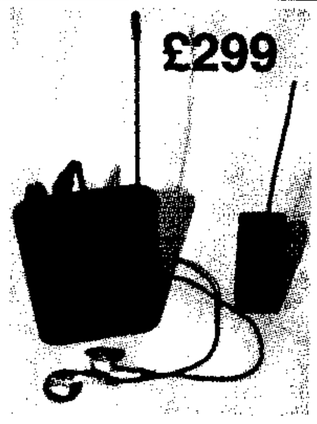

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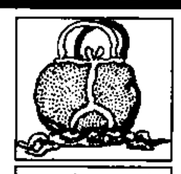

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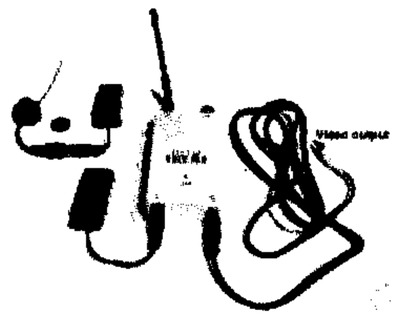

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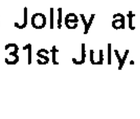

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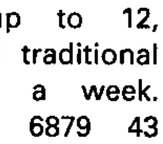

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BANKRUPTCY ASSOCIATION: Independent advice on debt problems. Website: www.theba.org.uk Telephone: 01524 64305.

TRACE DEBTORS AND MISSING PERSONS. www.tracetech.info info@tracetech.info Tel: 0800 071 3020.

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RENT-FREE RURAL COTTAGE, Suffolk coast, in return for 15 hours caring for lady with MS (and good sense of humour) by intelligent, positive man. Mostly weekends and evenings, experience unnecessary. Tel: 01394 450247 / 440.

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PARTNER NEEDED to provide start-up costs for educational business. Reply Box 99535.

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YOUNG, TALENTED, URBAN MUSIC PRODUCERS (brothers) seek break / work. Telephone: 07754 251 617.

WRITER (Radio 4 etc) seeks affordable garret in West or Central London. Excellent references. dalex@zoom.co.uk

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TERMINALLY ILL WOMAN needs £2K for funeral arrangements. Any help greatly appreciated. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 60839117.

FUNDS URGENTLY NEEDED to save ancient woodland from developers. S/C: 08-93-00. A/C:08392118.

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BLINDED BY M.S., Oxford graduate needs help funding retraining as voice-coach. www.gilesabbott.co.uk Reply Box 98424.

CUTTING EDGE environmental project needs funds to complete. Any offers. www.lowcarbon.co.uk S/C: 08-92-99. A/C: 69160813.

MANIC DEPRESSIVE. Two years, three breakdowns. Please help family in 20K debt. S/C: 30-98-91. A/C: 02706199.

SOUTH/EAST LONDON ACTRESS, single mother, has won drama place. Help appreciated; fees £10,000. Email: mojorush2004@yahoo.co.uk (change of email address)

BRIGHT BUT BROKE, £20K in the red after university; please help! Barclays, S/C: 20-20-65. A/C: 10135410.

GRADUATE: Urgently needs £3700 for 5-month, South African, Teaching and Conservation project. ANY DONATION GREATLY APPRECIATED. Contact a.burness1@ntlworld.com RBS, S/C: 83-21-05. A/C: 00633842.

HELP – HUSBAND SICK. Kids to support. Moving property. Failed business. Trying to survive. Please help. Thank you. S/C: 30-94-41. A/C: 00852889.

IT'S A LOVE THING – relocation required, need about 8K. Please help. S/C: 30-90-62. A/C: 07164426. Undeservedly yours. jon63@tiscali.co.uk

21-YEAR-OLD GIRL took me for everything. No fool like an old fool. Can you help? HSBC, S/C: 40-18-39. A/C 51207105.

DISABLED FEMALE needs £5000 to attend university. Anything appreciated! I could discover a cancer cure! Email: NaomiLCS@aol.com

TRANFORMATION IN PROGRESS: desperately needs funds to finish the work. All contributions gratefully received. Woolwich, S/C: 10-80-02. A/C: 40538164.

IN DEBT due to student loan. Working hard, anti-social hours, trying to suppress anxiety, to support adored epileptic wife. Please help. Nationwide, S/C: 07-44-56. A/C: 42360884.

HARD WORKING, low waged and exhausted, with no quality of life. Please help. Nationwide, S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 65222659.

20K URGENTLY NEEDED to make small business self-sufficient after promised backer walked. Barclays, S/C: 20-15-96. A/C: 00610356.

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AGONY. Imagine seven throbbing teeth 24/7. Unbearable pain, can't afford dentist. Please help. P. Iddon, Abbey National, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 29741893.

TRANSVESTITE needs new clothes to cheer herself up after brain tumour, thanks. susan_tv_99@yahoo.co.uk Natwest, S/C: 60-04-35. A/C: 34955496.

NEW PARENTS need cash for new business: Chance of a lifetime. Barclays, S/C: 20-35-35. A/C: 70171735.

LADY WRITER of erotic novels seeks funds for research. parmalilac @yahoo.com

BUDDHIST SEEKING £14,000 sponsorship for traditional Tibetan Three Year Retreat, including small monthly repayments, every little helps. S/C: 08-90-01. A/C: 13066963. Info: claremudra@hotmail.com

DEDICATED LAW STUDENT, funding fallen through but determined to qualify. Help appreciated. NatWest, S/C: 01-00-39. A/C: 60673451.

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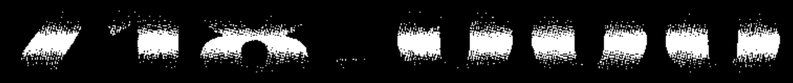

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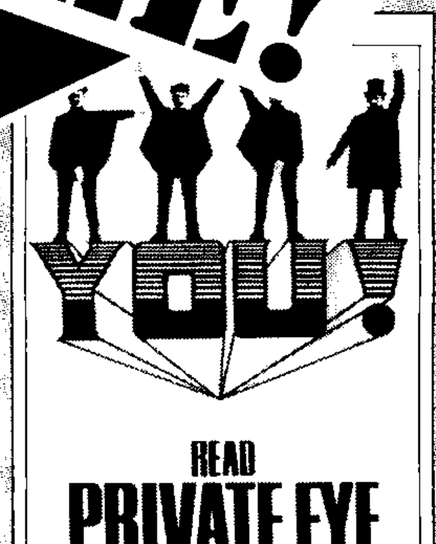

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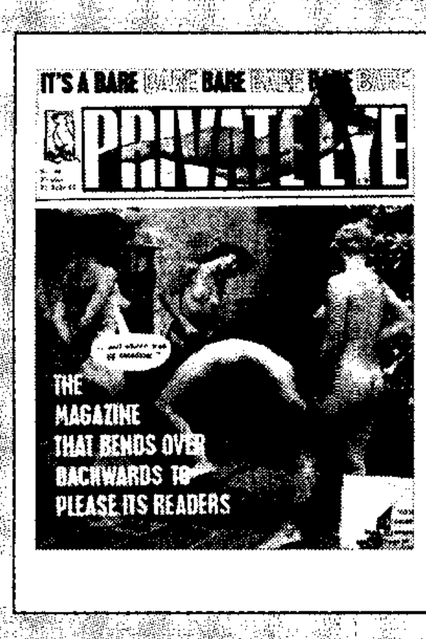

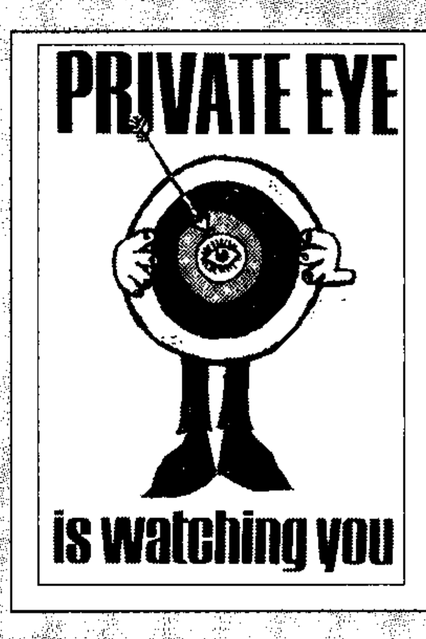

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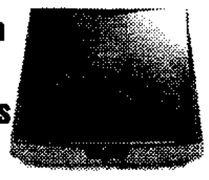

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£329.99 EX | **£387.74 inc VAT**

PORTABLE DAB TUNER

EVOKE-2 DIGITAL RADIO

Hiss free radio
Stereo output
LCD display
Auto-tune mode

Near CD quality portable radio, auto tune facility - finds all radio stations for your area, scrolling text display. Grade A returns, full 1 year warranty.
PURE Tempus 1 £79.99 (£93.99 Inc)
£99.99 EX | **£117.49 inc VAT**

TOSHIBA SAT P10-304

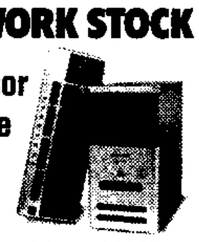
15.4" WIDESCREEN LAPTOP

Intel P4 2.66GHz
CD-RW/DVD drive
256MB DDR RAM
30GB hard drive

Intel Pentium 4 2.66GHz chip, 256MB DDR RAM, 30GB drive, CD-RW/DVD combo drive,15.4" W-TFT screen, built-in 56K/LAN, Windows XP Home. Toshiba classified stock, 1 year wty.
£599.99 EX | **£704.99 inc VAT**

COMPAQ S5500

FACTORY RE-WORK STOCK



XP 3000+ processor
DVD+R/+RW drive
128MB graphics
USB 2.0/Firewire

AMD Athlon 2.17GHz chip, 512MB DDR RAM, 120GB drive, DVD+R/RW drive, ATi Radeon 128MB graphics, modem/LAN/USB 2/Firewire ports, MS Win XP Home. Full 1 year wty.
£399.99 EX | **£469.99 inc VAT**

OLYMPUS C-5050Z

5 MEGAPIXEL CAMERA

High res digital
3x optical zoom
Tiltable TFT
Quality finish

Stunning 5 megapixel camera, 2560 x 1920 dpi res, 3x optical zoom lens (f1.8 - f2.6), auto/full manual modes, uses SM/CF or xD memory. As new with original accessories & 1 yr wty.
£299.99 EX | **£352.49 inc VAT**

VIDEOLOGIC ZXR-750

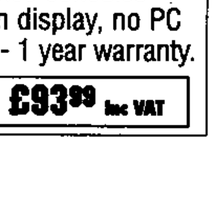
8 SPEAKER SET

7.1 compatible
84W output
Ideal for DVDs
Integrated amp

Videologic surround sound speakers, the perfect partner for any 5.1/6.1/7.1 sound card/DVD player, 28W RMS subwoofer, 7x 8W RMS satellites. Brand new stock - 2 year warranty.
£69.99 EX | **£82.24 inc VAT**

I470D PHOTO PRINTER

SUPERB QUALITY INKJET

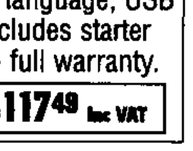


4800 x 1200 dpi
Direct print option
Integral card slot
Borderless printing

High resolution colour inkjet printer with built-in card reader, 4800 x 1200 dpi, borderless prints up to A4 size, direct printing option for compatible Canon digital cameras. Brand new.
£79.99 EX | **£93.99 inc VAT**

EXTERNAL DRIVES

FREECOM FX-1



48x 24x 48x speeds
Fast USB 2 interface

Easy to use external drive, 2MB internal buffer, inc Roxio Easy CD creator software. Brand new - 2 year warranty
£49.99 EX | **£58.74 inc VAT**

Classic SL: Whisper quiet 40GB ext hard drive, USB 2 i'face. Brand new.
£69.99 EX | **£82.24 inc VAT**

NIKON DIGITAL

COOLPIX 2100

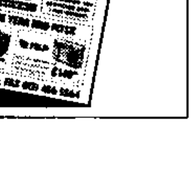
2.0 Megapixel
Compact design

1600 x 1200 dpi res, 3x optical zoom, macro mode & video capture facility. Grade A Nikon refurb - 6 month wty.
£79.99 EX | **£93.99 inc VAT**

CP 4300: 4 Megapixel, 3x zoom lens, Grade A Nikon refurb - 6 month wty.
£169.99 EX | **£199.74 inc VAT**

HP PAVILION A330

STOCK ROTATION

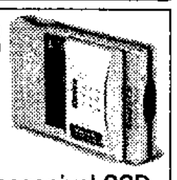


2.08GHz processor
HP DVD Re-writer
80GB hard drive
64MB nVidia video

AMD Athlon XP 2600+ chip, 256MB DDR RAM, 80GB drive, DVD+R/+RW drive, nVidia GeForce4 graphics, 56K modem/LAN/Firewire ports, MS Win XP Home. Full 1 year HP warranty.
£349.99 EX | **£411.24 inc VAT**

KONICA DIGITAL

KONICA REVIO Q



Pocket sized design
TFT colour screen

Only 13.5mm thin! 1.2 megapixel CCD, built-in flash, 14MB onboard RAM, movie clip capture. Brand new stock.
£42.54 EX | **£49.99 inc VAT**

KD100: 1.3 megapixel, 2x digital zoom, TFT screen, 8MB mem. Brand new.
£25.52 EX | **£29.99 inc VAT**

AVER TV BOX 3

EXTERNAL TV TUNER BOX

Works with LCD or CRT displays
No need to open your PC case!

Convert your monitor into a TV tuner, works with any CRT, LCD or plasma display, connect games consoles DVDs etc, full screen display, no PC required. Brand new - 1 year warranty.
£79.99 EX | **£93.99 inc VAT**

SAMSUNG ML-1750

SUB £100 17 PPM LASER

1200 x 600 dpi
8MB memory
Parallel & USB
250 sheet capacity

Samsung mono laser printer, max 17 pages/min printing, 1200 x 600 dpi resolution, PCL6 print language, USB & parallel interface, includes starter cartridge. Brand new - full warranty.
£99.99 EX | **£117.49 inc VAT**

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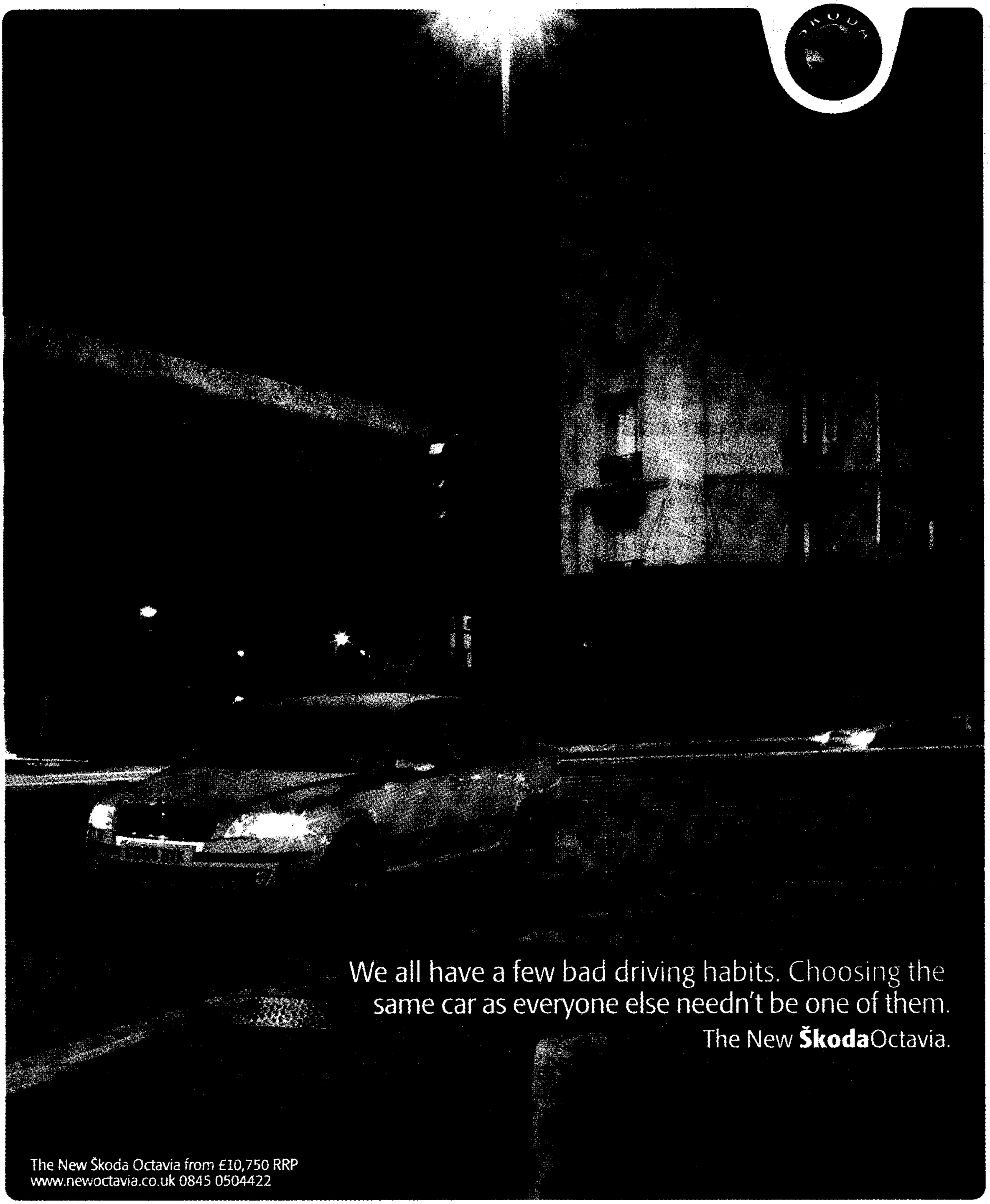
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FUEL CONSUMPTION FOR OCTAVIA RANGE IN MPG (L/100KM): URBAN 28.2 (10.0) – 42.8 (6.6); EXTRA-URBAN 47.9 (5.9) – 62.8 (4.5); COMBINED 38.2 (7.4) – 53.3 (5.3). CO_2 EMISSIONS (G/KM): 143 – 197. MODEL SHOWN IS THE OCTAVIA ELEGANCE 1.9 TDI PD 105 BHP £15,175 RRP INCLUDING METALLIC PAINT AT £275.